

choice

AT LOT OF GOOD
the skinny on diet clinics

THE PEOPLE'S WATCHDOG

280
products
reviewed!

TOMORROW'S WORLD
Future tech today

TESTS

Tablet computers
Digital radios
Child car seats
Fridges
Benchtop ovens
Induction cooktops
Playpens

OME WRECKERS

What to do when your
child goes bad

Road chaos

Navigating the confusion of car insurance

Doin' it for the kids

Whether it's newborns or the newly retired, CHOICE is looking out for all consumers of all ages

Please excuse the bright colours of my clothes. With a three-week-old baby at home I'm using every trick in the book to remain wide awake, even when I feel like I could curl up on the couch for much of the day!

It wasn't just self-interest that led to the decision almost a year ago to invest more of CHOICE's resources in testing more kids and babies products than ever before; it was also a growing membership of new parents and an army of grandparents wanting to pass information on to their children. This month we feature child car seats (page 69), probably the most important purchase to get right for any new parent.

For many people this is the time of year when they feel they need to lose weight, following the excesses of Christmas. So we thought we'd take a hard look at some of the many

weight loss clinics that are springing up in towns and cities across the country. To do this we sent a number of shadow shoppers into clinics. We found some pretty shocking misinformation and hard-sell tactics at some (page 20).

Each month when I look at the magazine, I'm reminded of how it allows CHOICE to fulfil our vision that Australians become the most savvy and active consumers in the world.

With every story we ask how our members can learn more and what action they can take as a result.

The basic consumer rights of safety, information, choice and the right to be heard form part of everything we do. It was these four consumer principles that John F Kennedy set out on 15 March

1962 in what later became known as the Consumer Bill of Rights. In his Congressional statement, Kennedy declared that "consumers by definition include us all. They are the largest economic group, affecting and affected by almost every public and private economic decision. Yet they are the only important group... whose views are often not heard."

Fifty years on, those words still form the heart of the consumer movement and informs the actions of CHOICE and other consumer organisations around the world.

Please remember this is your organisation, paid for by you, and that entitles you to have a say on what we do. My phone number (below) is available to all members and I encourage you to come to CHOICE and visit our labs (see page 10 for more). Hearing from you allows us to do our job better and we genuinely welcome our members getting involved in our work, whether it's campaigning with us or sharing ideas about issues and products for us to report on.

Nick Stace, CEO

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Twitter: @nickstacetweets



We're celebrating the 50-year anniversary of the Landmark Consumer Bill of Rights

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE gives you the power to choose the very best goods and services, and avoid the worst. We pay full price for all the products we test, so we remain 100% independent. We don't take advertising and we don't accept freebies from industry. We're not a government body and our consumer publishing and advocacy is almost entirely funded by subscriptions to our magazines, choice.com.au and from other services we supply to benefit members and consumers. CHOICE product ratings are based on lab tests, expert assessments and consumer surveys. CHOICE staff also research a wide range of consumer services. They reveal the truth behind the facts and figures, and investigate the quality and the claims.

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Only one to fully recommend



Our shadow shoppers are served up some dubious weight loss advice



Channel Ten has the dubious honour of having the most programs in the top 10 "fattest" shows

The skinny on fat TV

Ever wondered which Australian TV shows advertise the most junk food ads while they are on air? Wonder no longer. The NSW Cancer Council has launched Fat Free TV, an online initiative that highlights the best and worst shows on the box when it comes to advertising junk food, including worst offender Channel Ten's Saturday

AFL and top-rating Junior MasterChef. Channels Nine and Seven don't fare much better, with several shows in the top 10. The top 10 "healthiest" shows are all found on the ad-free ABC.

For more information on your favourite shows, or on how to get involved in the push to demand fat-free TV, head to fatfreetv.com.au.

KATE BROWNE

Shadow shop of horrors

Only three per cent of financial plans were graded as good in a recent shadow shop of retirement advice undertaken by ASIC.

Roughly one-third of the 64 plans were graded poor and almost two-thirds adequate. ASIC says there was a consistent failure by advisers to talk to clients about what they can realistically fund out of their retirement savings.

ASIC commissioner Peter Kell reported the results at the

Parliamentary Joint Committee hearing of the Future of Financial Advice reforms, which are aimed at improving the quality of the advice as well as lifting public trust and confidence.

At this hearing, CHOICE argued the case for reform is overwhelming. "Any delay will see consumers continue to have their investments eroded by commissions and other unfair, unclear and excessive charges," said Christopher Zinn, CHOICE director of campaigns and communications.

UTA MIHM

36%
of 64 retirement
financial plans
were graded poor
by ASIC

Hidden costs

When you roll up to the pharmacy counter with your prescription, chances are you'll be asked if you'd prefer a cheaper generic version of the drug you need.

Generic medicines contain the same active ingredient in the same quantity as a big brand product and work the same way. However, their other ingredients – binders, disintegrants, coatings, fillers and so on, which, along with the active ingredient, make up the formulation, may be different. These should be inert, but some may in fact react with the other ingredients in the formulation or cause reactions in patients.

Products that could cause problems for susceptible people include tartrazine (a colouring), benzalkonium chloride (a preservative), sodium metabisulphite and propyl gallate (antioxidants), lactose, sesame oil and lanolin.

So if you have sensitivities to various food additives, think twice next time your pharmacist asks if you'd prefer a cheaper alternative of your medicine. Ask for the consumer medicines information leaflet, which will detail the ingredients.

KARINA BRAY



BREAKING NEWS

Overrated

ANZ may have started the latest interest rate-raising party despite the RBA leaving the cash rate untouched last month, but it wasn't long before the other big three joined in. And it isn't just the big boys. Citing the cost of overseas funding, banks across the country are dipping into consumers' pockets to keep their profit margins on track. Our take on the issue? Shop around, paying particular attention to smaller mutuals and credit unions.

Dodgy discounts

The average margin on fuel increased by two cents per litre during the Woolworths and Coles 8c per-litre double discount offer, which started in late October 2011, the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) says. The AAA compared prices before and during the offer period, and according to executive director Andrew McKellar, "motorists who believed they were being offered a special discount have been duded and those without a shopper docket have been paying more than they should for petrol". The ACCC disputes the research.

ADSL capped

Consumers can expect to see a drop in the cost of ADSL broadband internet after the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission capped the wholesale amount Telstra can charge retail internet service providers for access to their network.

Still life

A device that can take great still photos as well as HD video has long been an ideal for consumers, and the GC-PX10 is the latest attempt by JVC to deliver an all-in-one solution.

On first inspection, it looks and feels like a standard still camera, with a three-inch flip-out LCD screen, large barrel lens (10x zoom) and hefty weight (510g) making single-handed operation difficult. But when holding the body with the right hand with the left hand supporting the lens, the camera feels solid, and exposure and lens controls are within easy reach.

We tested this device primarily as a video camera that takes stills, and found the overall performance across various exposure situations such as daylight, indoor lighting and low light to be comparable to many of the dedicated camcorders available at the same price.

Like most HD video cameras the GC-PX10 lets you extract a still from video, with each still equivalent to the image from a 2.7Mp camera. But the GC-PX10 can also capture 8.3Mp still shots at a rate of up to 50 frames per second for up to 130 shots, which is a handy option

for action photographers or anyone trying to get the perfect family shot as the kids run around.

The camera also has a slow-motion mode capturing video at up to 250fps, creating the slow-mo video effect popular on sports programs. You may find the 32GB internal memory isn't enough for a longer shoot, so when out and about you'll need to pack a couple of removable SD cards. The camera supports SDXC cards up to 64GB.

CHOICE VERDICT

This hybrid device looks and feels like a still camera on steroids. If that's the combination you're looking for, the GC-PX10 may be the right fit.

DENIS GALLAGHER

JVC GC-PX10

PRICE \$1099

CONTACT jvc.com.au

TALKBACK

Have your dealings with financial advisers made you think twice about the value of their services? Or are you a happy financial advice customer? Whatever your experiences, please

let us know about it. You can email talkback@choice.com.au, or visit us on Facebook or Twitter (@choiceaustralia).



Good in theory, poor in practice

The new year should have got off to a good start for people looking for a home loan, thanks to the government's banking reforms. And, as a key recommendation of the CHOICE Better Banking campaign, banks are now required to provide consumers with a key facts sheet when enquiring about a home loan. However, consumers need to ask for one – and it's this catch that is already proving difficult.

The purpose of this one-page summary is to make it easy to compare loans, fees and ongoing costs rather than struggling through a variety of different brochures, handouts and

information provided by each financial institution you visit.

We decided to put this to the test.

Four shadow shoppers visited 18 bank and

credit union branches in a variety of locations in Sydney between mid-January and early February. All posed as a first-home buyer looking to borrow about \$300,000, and asked if they could be provided with comparative fee and interest information they could take away, without using the phrase "key facts sheet".

The results were unpleasantly surprising. Of the 18 branches visited, only one was able to provide our

Overall it seems that bank staff have little or no idea home loan key facts sheets even exist

shadow shopper the key facts sheet – and this was only after they asked four times. At two branches the shadow shoppers were turned away and asked to call to make an appointment, while at another a bank staffer said she'd heard of some kind of fact sheet but didn't think it was available yet. One wrote out the details of the various home loans on a piece of paper (branded with an insurance company and not the bank in question), while others seemed to be far more interested in getting our

shoppers into a pre-approval situation for a loan. One of our shadow shoppers was even asked if she planned on having children as she discussed the loan process but still didn't receive a key facts sheet.

While most of the institutions we visited do provide key fact sheets on their websites, overall it seems that bank staff have little or no idea the fact sheets even exist. A spokesperson from ASIC, the regulator responsible

for policing key facts sheets, told us it's "monitoring compliance with the new reforms by looking at individual complaints and industry-wide conduct."

"It seems the last thing the big banks want to do is help consumers compare products," says CHOICE head of campaigns, Matt Levey. "We don't think consumers should have to come up with three magic words – key facts sheets – to get access to clear information to help them find the best mortgage offer." **KATE BROWNE**

Move to a different beat

CHOICE has launched **Move Your Money**, a new campaign aimed at helping thousands of Australians look beyond the big four banks, save money and drive competition. The campaign is about putting power back in the hands of consumers and sending the big four a message they can't ignore following their mortgage interest rate rises early last month. **Move Your Money** will build towards **World Consumer Rights Day** on 15 March. This year marks the 50th anniversary of US President John F Kennedy's landmark statement defining consumer rights. Go to choice.com.au/moveyourmoney to become involved.

MATT LEVEY

The juice on juice

Australia is now testing for the fungicide carbendazim in imported orange juice following its recent detection in Brazilian-sourced orange juice in the US. Australia imports most of its orange juice concentrate from Brazil.

Carbendazim, which can cause infertility and testicular damage, is banned in many countries but permitted in Brazil where it's used to combat the growth of black spot mould. Coca-Cola Amatil alerted US authorities after detecting the

fungicide in Brazilian orange juice used in its Minute Maid brand. Previously there has been a "safe" limit to the

level of carbendazim in oranges and orange juice sold in Australia, but any residue is now illegal.

FSANZ is advising consumers not to be too concerned about drinking orange juice. It says that based on the levels of carbendazim found in the latest Australian Total Diet Study, a 70kg adult would have to drink about 150L of orange juice in a day – 40L for the average four-year-old child – before going over the safe level.

RACHEL CLEMONS



Where will we be in 2025?

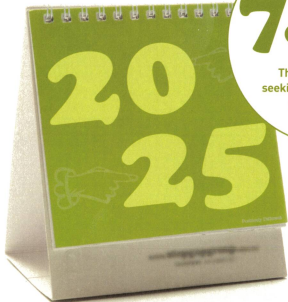
Research specialists IBIS World have used their number-crunching skills to present some important projections on what Australia will look like in 2025.

With an expected population of 28.5 million, we're depending on current strong birth rates and net migration to help ease the inflationary effects of retired baby boomers and increasing life expectancy. Western Australia will likely add another one million to its population and claim the crown for the fastest-

growing state, and perhaps not surprisingly, we're expected to double our renewable energy output, with solar and wind energy leading the way.

To see what the future holds for TV and gadget technology, see our report on page 50.

BRENDAN MAYS



20%

The amount renewable energy will contribute to total power supply in 2025

7.5m

The number of women seeking jobs in 2025, up from today's 5.6 million

25 minutes

The amount of additional leisure time we will have each week in 2025

➤ I SAY

Making a Bosch of it

In early December last year, my expensive Bosch induction cooktop, still covered under warranty, broke. This is one of those "I had to wait for seven weeks and be home six times for it to finally get fixed" stories – but it comes with some juicy twists.

TWIST 1 The tale of the dodgy call-back service During multiple attempts to contact Bosch, I was offered an attractive alternative to waiting on hold: I could enter my contact details and hang up. "We'll call you back once your call-back has reached the front of the queue." But every time I tried it, my place in the queue wasn't held and I was never called back.

TWIST 2 The supervisor shuffle Want to speak with a supervisor? Take a seat on the "we'll have to transfer you to another department, hold please" merry-go-round.

"I'm a journalist and I'm writing a story on this." Suddenly I was offered an extension on my warranty, copious apologies, and spare parts appeared as if out of thin air

TWIST 3 The "I'm a journalist" trump card After waiting six weeks, having almost half a dozen service visits and spending literally hours on hold, I got results. Not because I'd been treated badly and Bosch was sorry. Or because the subcontractors, Matic Service, who turned up without parts and didn't reconnect the stove properly, admitted they'd got it wrong. Not even because I bombarded

Bosch's Facebook page. It was because I uttered those magic words: "Can I speak to someone in your communications team? I'm a journalist and I'm writing a story on this".

Suddenly I was offered an extension on my warranty, copious apologies, and spare parts appeared as if out of thin air.

So what does Bosch have to say about all this? On the first point, a spokesperson admitted their call-back service does not operate the way they claimed. "The message on the call centre hold system will now be changed," he said. At time of writing the message remained, but will apparently be changed in two weeks. On the second and third points, the spokesperson claimed if I had been put through to a supervisor (as they say is their policy) when I requested, he would have "located the spare parts and offered you the extended warranty without having to know you were a journalist, as this is also part of BSH's [Bosch's] goodwill gesture. Unfortunately this was another instance of human error."

Somehow, I can't take their word for it.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH

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Unfair terms

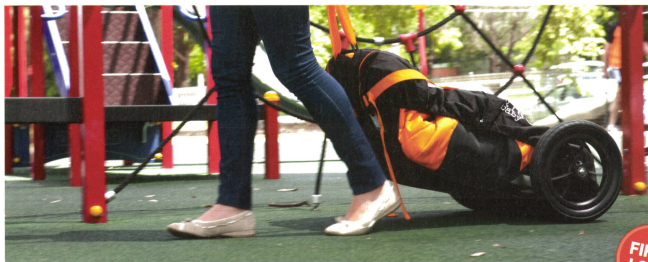
Regulators may allow banks to sell a new type of term deposit product that can only be broken with 31 days' notice, meaning you'd have to wait that long if you needed to access your money early.

Traditional term deposits can be broken at any time with almost immediate access to funds. ASIC is considering placing restrictions on the new product, including a new name to clearly distinguish it from existing term deposits, and strict consent provisions. Banks will be obliged to obtain express consent and also notify consumers of these new term deposits that they may be able to get a better rate with another product. This is intended to address the practice of banks automatically rolling over existing deposits into the same maturity terms, rather than the term with the highest available rate.

While the new product is expected to help banks meet international regulatory requirements by having a substantial deposit buffer that can't be immediately withdrawn, the benefits for consumers are unclear. There are no details yet available on interest rates that may apply to these new term deposits.

ELIZABETH MCNEES





Rolling along

The Stroller Roller Universal Travel Bag from Valco Baby is designed to make transporting your stroller easier. It uses the stroller's wheels and will give it a tidy look when it's packed for travelling. The bag is compatible with most three- and four-wheel

models, but if in doubt try it with your particular model before you buy.

Before using the bag, you may need to pull apart the front wheel(s), separate removable seats from the frame and fiddle with components such as handles and canopies. Adjustable flaps and straps enclose and secure the stroller in the bag. Depending on your model, it may take up to 15 minutes to pack and 10 minutes to unpack and reassemble the stroller. For a short trip, this process isn't ideal.

If the wheels of your stroller roll freely, then the Stroller Roller will be easy to move around, but it does add 1.5kg to your load. With only one handle at one end and nothing on the side, lifting the bag can be difficult and awkward.

We can only see the value in this accessory if you regularly travel by air or take other long-haul trips. While your stroller will be neatly packed away, there's little protection against baggage handling – removable parts, straps and flaps need to be secured as those left loose could snag.

CHOICE VERDICT

The Stroller Roller does a good job of keeping your stroller packed away neatly. However, it hardly seems worth the effort if it needs to be repeatedly pulled apart and reassembled. If you're using the bag when travelling by air, make sure all components are firmly secured – you don't want to arrive at your destination only to realise you've lost the wheels to your stroller along the way. **REBECCA GATTO**



VALCO STROLLER ROLLER

PRICE \$80

CONTACT valco.com.au



Cast off clothes in the compost?

When it comes to landfill most of us think of what's in our garbage bin, not our closet. But research from the UK shows up to two million tonnes of textiles – mostly clothes – is dumped into landfill each year.

Puma recently announced it's developing the first compostable or recyclable shoes, T-shirts and bags. CEO Franz Koch says the company is working with partners to develop products on the principle of "cradle-to-cradle" design. While it's early days, in future, dumping last season's wardrobe might involve a trip to the garden compost bin rather than the tip.

KATE BROWNE

Get social...

Join us on Facebook and Twitter for a glimpse behind the scenes of CHOICE and to share your views.



choice MEMBERS NOTICEBOARD

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choice
SHOPPER

1300 360 655

CHOICE Shopper

Do you like to get the best deal but have better things to do than run around town? We've got some good news for you. As a CHOICE member, you get free access to our CHOICE Shopper service.

CHOICE Shopper, available to personal subscribers for most purchases over \$100 only, does the shopping and negotiating on your behalf to make sure you're getting the best price.

We've already helped members save more than \$600,000 – with an average saving of 10% across a range of products and services. And it's all just a phone call away.

Products we can help you with include:

- Electrical appliances for the laundry and kitchen
- Home entertainment
- Cameras, lenses and accessories
- Mowers and brushcutters
- Computers, printers and scanners
- Theme parks, tours and tourist attractions
- Cars (over \$10,000)

To find out more about CHOICE Shopper, visit choice.com.au/choice-shopper or call 1300 360 655 (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm).

Member spotlight

Introducing CHOICE member Dennis O'Brien. He's 62 years young, retired, married with two children and one grandchild and happy to be very active and healthy.

Why did you join CHOICE?

I subscribe to CHOICE Online for access to genuinely independent research on products and services.

What section/s of CHOICE Online do you view first and why?

My passion is photography so cameras come first. Next are white and brown goods, TVs and other electricals, and then things such as rental cars and other stuff we all use at times.

Have you made any CHOICE recommended purchases?

Yes, for dishwashers, notebooks, TVs, cameras, washing machines and fridges.

Which CHOICE campaigns have you found to be most important to you?

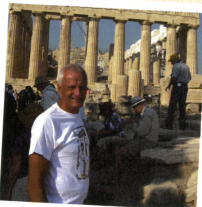
Food freshness and bank charges were great. The CHOICE Shonky Awards for lemons and duds of the year are also top of my reading list.

What product/s would you like to see CHOICE put to the test?

Travelling alarm clocks – I can't seem to get one that doesn't have a loud tick. I'd also love to see you do a report on the wax used on apples – I bet it's palm oil or something nasty!

Tell us about your CHOICE experiences, become our next Member in the Spotlight!

Send us an email at inthespotlight@choice.com.au.



Lab tours are back!



All members are invited to participate in CHOICE's famous lab tours, which will be held at 10.30am on Wednesday 14 March, Thursday 12 April, and Wednesday 16 May. Enjoy morning tea with CHOICE CEO, Nick Stace, or our director of campaigns and communications, Christopher Zinn, and see testing in action. For more details, see choice.com.au/about-us/how-we-test or, alternatively, email us at labtours@choice.com.au to make a booking.

FIRST
LOOK

Worlds apart

The Samsung Galaxy Nexus is less about the phone and more about the latest Android OS it runs on – 4.0, code-named Ice Cream Sandwich (ICS).

But improvements to the hardware are evident as well. It's relatively light compared with many phones out there, and with a 4.65" diagonal screen size it's one of the big ones. Whether this is suitable for you will depend on the size of your hands. There's a slight curve to the phone so it sits against your ear a little better, and a bulge towards the bottom doesn't take away from the comfort of holding it.

The battery cover has a plasticky feel to it, and while easy to remove it's fiddly to get back on. A lack of SD slot may not suit those who use a lot of music, video or photos, but recharging via a standard USB slot is a plus. The AMOLED (active-matrix organic light-emitting diode) screen is very clear and similar to the iPhone's, though the Nexus has a much larger display. However, this costs in battery life – half a day's moderate use, and we started to get charging anxiety.

The welcome changes that ICS brings include more intuitive settings via quick access to commonly used settings and adding data usage. Downloading apps puts shortcuts

SAMSUNG GALAXY NEXUS GT-I9250T

PRICE From \$899 or starting from \$0 on various telco plans

CONTACT samsung.com.au



straight onto the desktop, which we found very useful. The ability to swipe to access various apps rather than navigate to them via tabs in the browser gives additional functionality. You can also nest apps in folders, which is useful if you're running out of room on the screen. Putting commonly used punctuation above the keyboard makes sense and allows for quicker SMS. And typing is quick and responsive, as is the camera, which has barely any shutter lag.

A new face-recognition unlock feature is neat but not particularly secure, as we found you can use a photo to trick the phone.

CHOICE VERDICT

The many small changes included with ICS make this Android phone more intuitive, feature rich and easy to use on a daily basis – though only if the battery lasts that long. **MATTHEW STEEN**

Coded message

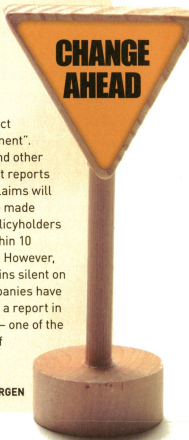
Changes to the General Insurance Code of Practice approved last month by the Insurance Council of Australia are meant to benefit policyholders, but consumer advocates – including CHOICE – have questioned whether they go far enough.

The changes appear to leave enough wriggle room for insurers to continue with business as usual. For instance, insurers will now have a four-month limit to accept or deny a claim, although if they can't make the deadline they merely have to inform policyholders.

It's a similar story with other changes. A new right to claim clause says "we will not discourage you from lodging a claim," but comes with a caveat: "telling a customer that a policy does not provide cover for a loss will not, of itself, constitute an act of discouragement".

Hydrology and other external expert reports used to deny claims will now have to be made available to policyholders on request within 10 business days. However, the code remains silent on how long companies have to commission a report in the first place – one of the main causes of prolonged disputes.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



Switching on

CHOICE's first super-complaint, part of a pilot project with NSW Fair Trading, has been lodged. It relates to commercial energy-switching sites, with CHOICE finding that NSW consumers may not be getting the best deal available on these sites, contrary to their expectations. Switching sites play an important role in providing

accessible, easy-to-understand information to consumers on the range of available products. But after analysing a range of commercial switching sites, we found that even if you enter the same information into these sites, you can end up with very different versions of the best deal. A typical consumer in Taree, NSW, for example, could save an estimated \$300 a year on their annual electricity bill if they used one site over another.

It is not always clear that a site may only compare some of the available energy plans. Some also don't provide details on applicable fees and charges.

Consumers have told us they find it difficult to compare electricity plans and independence is a factor they look for in switching sites. We've made a series of recommendations, including a code or accreditation system for switching sites so that consumers can identify the transparent, accurate and comprehensive switching sites. For more on our super-complaint, see choice.com.au/switchingsites.

KATRINA LEE

Apple in a fix

Allegations that five major publishers and Apple conspired to increase the price of ebooks have been heated up, with new information added to a US-based class action.

Filed by consumers in the US in August 2011, the class action alleges that Apple, HarperCollins, Hachette, Macmillan, Penguin and Simon & Schuster illegally fix prices of ebooks.

According to Hagens Berman, the lawyers representing consumers, publishers were so averse to Amazon's discount pricing of ebooks that "they conspired with Apple to force Amazon to adopt a new agency model in which publishers set prices directly, effectively ending Amazon's ability to provide consumer-friendly pricing."

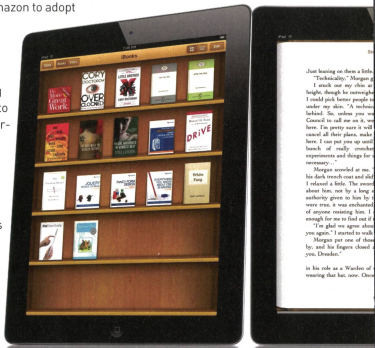
The complaint was updated to include information from Walter Isaacson's biography, *Steve Jobs*. According to Hagens Berman, Isaacson documents Apple's initiation

of the agency model, and their demand that other retailers shouldn't be allowed to sell ebooks cheaper than Apple.

The updated complaint also alleges that, on average, ebooks became 30% more expensive after the adoption of the new model, and bestsellers shot up by 40%, and as a result "some ebooks now cost more than their print counterparts".

In December last year the EU began proceedings to investigate the antitrust allegations.

ZOYA SHEFTALOVICH



Inadequate cover continues

The Consumer Action Law Centre has shone a spotlight on hire car insurance, calling it a particularly slippery form of indemnity cover. In one case study a consumer was stung with a \$30,000 bill thanks to exclusions in her policy. The exclusions can be many – such as no cover for overhead damage, undercarriage damage, water or hail damage, or no cover for accidents that occur as result of minor traffic infringements or when drivers aren't sufficiently "cautious". For a list of exclusions and tricks and traps, see choice.com.au/carhire or CHOICE May 2011.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



World wide war

The battle around online copyright infringement in the US has come to a head. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and other related acts that threaten to adversely affect operation of the internet on the basis of copyright sparked some of the largest online protests from industry in history, including the shutdown of Wikipedia and a Google petition that attracted more than seven million signatures.

7m
The number of signatures a petition against SOPA attracted

Media heavyweights, including Rupert Murdoch, are the main drivers of the call for reform.

Murdoch recently called Google the "piracy leader" on Twitter (ironically one of the websites thought to be under threat by the SOPA bill) and accused President Obama of colluding with thieves.

Some critics suggest governments could use SOPA as a basis for applying censorship, and although the bill has been shut down for now, copyright concerns will likely continue to be a key issue in the near future.

BRENDAN MAYS

A dodgy alternative

Thirty-four of Australia's most prominent doctors, medical researchers and scientists have voiced their concern after Central Queensland University recently announced plans to join a growing number of Australian universities in teaching "alternative" medicine courses as a science.

The group has written to the university criticising the decision to train chiropractors, in what they see as a trend to offer courses in the sciences and health not supported by valid scientific evidence.

Professor Alastair MacLennan

from the University of Adelaide says that while the announcement from CQU triggered a decision to make the group's concerns public, the issue is much bigger, with the academic "teaching" of unproven beliefs such as homeopathy, naturopathy and iridology in public institutions. He also called for action from the federal government to set high standards.

Australian universities are currently self-accrediting. For more on alternative medicine diagnostics, see *CHOICE* July 2011 or choice.com.au/dodgydiagnostics. **KATE BROWNE**

Scam buster week

The Australasian Consumer Fraud Task Force and the Australian Institute of Criminology annual scam survey is on again. The survey was released in the lead-up to a global scam awareness week, which begins 19 March 2012. Last year's results

showed an increase in landline phone and SMS scams.

A widespread phishing scam last year involved call centres contacting Australians and asking them to run a program on their computer that gave over control of the computer to the

scammers. They claimed to provide computer support and used warning messages in the victims' Windows Event Viewer to convince them they had a problem.

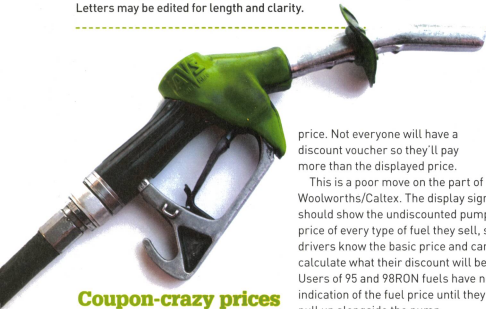
To take part in the survey, go to aic.gov.au by 31 March.

UTA MIHM



Your Say

We want to hear from you. If your experience is not good, then you can help other CHOICE members avoid scams and rip-offs. If you've had a great response to a complaint you've taken to a manufacturer or retailer, our members want to know about that too! Email us at yoursay@choice.com.au or write to Your Say, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.



Coupon-crazy prices

Iwould like to draw your attention to Woolworths/Caltex co-branded petrol station pricing policies. The main display for unleaded petrol shows a discounted

price. Not everyone will have a discount voucher so they'll pay more than the displayed price.

This is a poor move on the part of Woolworths/Caltex. The display signs should show the undiscounted pump price of every type of fuel they sell, so drivers know the basic price and can calculate what their discount will be. Users of 95 and 98RON fuels have no indication of the fuel price until they pump up alongside the pump.

Tony Pelling, Nicholls, ACT

CHOICE SAYS Some states have regulations regarding petrol station

pricing boards. In NSW, a station is only required to display their unleaded price. In WA, if a station sells more than three types of fuel, they need only display three of those types, including unleaded. Unfortunately, most states don't have any rules about the kind of information, if any, is required on petrol pricing boards.

Woolworths, which operates the co-branded outlets, told us their discounted price is more prominently displayed on price boards because many customers use their Everyday Rewards cards. "At most petrol stations, the non-discounted price is shown below the discounted price. However, in stations with smaller price boards where there is less space to list prices of other fuels, the non-discounted price may not be listed," a spokesperson said.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Phoning in poor service

My elderly mother recently phoned Optus (her landline and internet provider) to advise them she would be moving in two weeks. She booked her disconnection for the date of the move.

Fifteen minutes later, both her phone and internet were cut off. She contacted Optus only to be advised it would take 10 days to reconnect the services. She faced being out of pocket and having to use her mobile phone to contact the many people she needed to assist her with moving house. She has also lost some email contacts as

she had no chance to let them know of her change of email address.

Escalating the complaint led to more apologies, a waiver of her monthly fee and a \$100 credit to help pay for her mobile phone calls, but the 10-day reconnection timeframe remained. How can it take Optus 10 days to reconnect a customer in this day and age, especially when they make the mistake in the first place?

Monique Brunello, Berowra, NSW

CHOICE SAYS ACMA's recent Reconnecting the Customer public

inquiry (see page 26) was aimed at identifying and tackling the kinds of issues experienced here. ACMA found that many consumers, regardless of which telco they are with, are dissatisfied with their experience of customer care in the industry.

This case is particularly problematic, due to the out-of-pocket costs for Monique's mother and the danger of an elderly person being left without a means of contacting others. In such circumstances, we recommend filing an official complaint with





Swimming in excuses

I purchased a Sunseeker swimming costume for \$130. I wore it both in the ocean and in a swimming pool. The first time I rinsed it in fresh water was after the second or third wear; I hung the costume upside down to dry and the black colour ran into the white trim. I never folded or rolled the suit.

I tried to get the stain out by washing it, but when that didn't work I took it back to the retailer and asked for them to replace it. They returned it to Skye Group [the makers of Sunseeker], who suggested I hadn't cared for it properly and rejected my request for a replacement or refund.

the Telecommunications Industry Ombudsman, either online at tio.com.au or over the phone on 1800 062 058.

After CHOICE contacted Optus, a representative called Monique's mother to help correct the situation and "apologise for the inconvenience that has occurred. Her service was disconnected due to human error," says an Optus spokesperson. "We have assigned a senior customer relations representative to resolve this issue and [Monique's mother] has advised us she was happy with the outcome."

I expect that over the course of time a swimsuit will fade or become worn, but I don't expect the colour to run after rinsing a swimsuit only once or after I've only worn it a few times. Skye Group claims there are no faults on the garment, but if the colour runs or "transfers" when I first rinse it, then the quality of the dye or the process of dyeing the garment needs to be addressed.

Jen Dowd, Sydney, NSW

CHOICE SAYS *This may be a case of the retailer not meeting its legal obligations under the Australian Consumer Law. According to the Fair Trading NSW, all goods sold must be of acceptable quality. This means they will be "safe, durable and free from defects. They will be acceptable in appearance and finish."*

The retailer should have replaced or refunded the costume, whichever option Jen chose. After attempting to resolve the issue with the retailer and the manufacturer, the next step is to contact your local fair trading department. Once the complaint has been lodged, it may be much easier to obtain a satisfactory resolution for the situation.

A spokesperson from Skye Group offered Jen a replacement swimsuit in good faith after we contacted them, but stood by their assessment. "Normally we attribute those spots to the black coming in contact with the white due to folding when it's wet. If it ran after being hung upside down you would expect the colour to run through the entire white piece."

Thumbs

 In 2008 I bought some Pearl Izumi Mountain Bike shoes. As they became more used, the material alongside the lace holes on the right shoe split. I went onto the Pearl Izumi website and discovered they offer a lifetime warranty. I supplied them with digital images of the fault, then sent the shoes to Sydney for appraisal. I soon received a new replacement pair. My cup overfloweth!

Bruce Evanson, Newborough, Vic

 I bought a new car that came with a free Uniden GPS system. At the time Uniden were advertising a special offer of three years of free map upgrades. I asked Uniden Australia if I would be eligible for the free maps because I'd received the GPS as a bonus gift with my car. They honoured the free upgrade. A big pat on the back for their efforts!

Lynette McGregor, Lakelands, WA

 A massive thank you to Swallow Formal. I used a voucher to buy two pairs of shoes, and after a couple of weeks one pair developed a fault. I emailed the voucher company and also Swallow Formal directly to see about obtaining a replacement, and received a replacement pair in the mail within days.

Fantastic service!
Linda Mitchell de Barrios, Gold Coast, Qld





Home wrecker

One in five consumers ends up unhappy with their domestic building project. **Andy Kollmorgen** explains why – and how you can avoid joining them

If you're seeking compensation for a botched building project, you may want to hire a good lawyer. State consumer protection agencies are not set up to deliver speedy outcomes – especially when the stakes are high – and there are limits to what they can do. They mainly act as mediators and keep a blacklist of serial offenders.

The upshot is that you're better off taking preventative steps before the damage is done. Judging by what CHOICE has heard from people who are still sweeping up after a building project gone bad, a little advance planning can prevent a lot of pain.

Regulations are in place to make sure builders do what they're supposed to do, but the guidelines are confusing and many states have multiple agencies with overlapping jurisdictions. In Victoria, for instance, a long list of builder-associated roles comes under the heading of "builder practitioners", including surveyors, architects, engineers and tradespeople. All need to be registered with the Building Practitioners Board to do jobs costing more than \$5000. This may sound reassuring, except that workers don't have to be registered with the board for single jobs of any price if they involve plastering,

tiling, flooring, glazing, insulating, painting, plumbing or electrical work. Then again, if a person contracts for more than one kind of task as part of the job in Victoria – painting and plastering, say – they need to be registered, and then they're called building practitioners.

Blame the builder

Builders as a licence class generated far more complaints to NSW Fair Trading in recent years than tradespeople specialising in specific skills such as plumbing, paving and electrical. And poor workmanship was far and away the number one gripe about



builders, generating 59% of complaints. The category with the second-highest number of complaints, materials, came in at a distant 13%, while plumbing/draining/gas-fitting drew the most complaints about individual tradespeople at 8.5%.

A spokesperson from NSW Fair Trading's Home Building Division told us builders are the subject of most complaints because they're attributed to the name on the contract regardless of which subcontractor did the individual task. "The only work a builder cannot do is the specialist trades of plumbing, electrical, gas fitting and air conditioning. But even in these trades, the builder is the person we record the complaints against regardless of which trade did the actual work."

Of course, the builder may have done the shoddy work themselves, and the job may have been outside their range of expertise. NSW Fair Trading acknowledges this happens, but mostly outside the major cities. "Because it can be very expensive to send all the required trades to a remote property, a painter

will often install or repair gyprock or a cabinet-maker who is installing a kitchen will also do the gyprocking, tiling, painting and even minor electrical or plumbing work on occasion," the spokesperson said.

But the real issue appears to be that builders can subcontract all the tasks that make up a project to whomever they want. One builder saga last year concerned a home-building company that operates in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and SA. The theme was shoddy workmanship done by fleeting freelancers, and there were many victims. "It's infuriating when you allocate days off work to have only a quarter of the existing and acknowledged repairs attempted and you have to repeat the process due to inferior quality, unfinished and unsupervised repairs," one consumer said.

A tradesperson pointed out that "most building supervisors put every possible tradesman on top of each other at once, regardless of whether their respective jobs are compatible with each other".

Reputation is everything

The Victoria Building Commission (VBC) reports that about 86% of consumers polled last year said they had confidence in their builders, although residential projects generated more complaints than commercial ones. The level of confidence has been at 80% or above since 2003, the commission says. Sixty-eight of the 300 domestic consumers polled reported having a problem with their builder, including 29 who had problems so big they sought third-party intervention by the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal or other agencies. Most of the issues related to quality of work, and consumers rated their satisfaction with the outcome of the intervention at 5.4 on a scale of 1 to 10.

Consumers appear to be poorly served in up to 20% of building projects – that's why it's crucial to check and recheck a builder's qualifications and reputation before the work begins, for instance: ▶

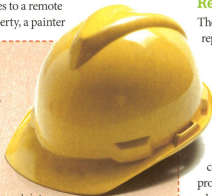
The real issue appears to be that builders can subcontract all the tasks

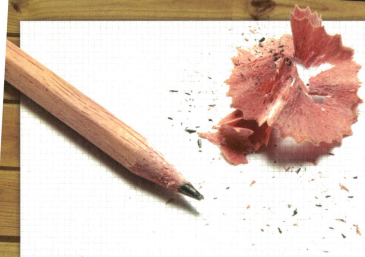
DIY DANGERS

Master Builders Association (MBA) of NSW executive director Brian Seidler says many complaints about builders come about when owners attempt to do the work themselves. After owners stuff things up, licensed builders are often called in to fix the mistakes, a task that can involve dismantling what's been done. That's bound to rub owners the wrong way and lead to complaints.

Non-professional owner-builders can take a builder course over the internet for as little as \$170 and may develop a dangerous sense of self-confidence. Seidler strongly recommends consumers use licensed builders and check their credentials carefully. "If someone embarks on a project as an owner-builder they won't have access to some very important protections," he says. "First, the skill and expertise of the builder, and second the licensing regime that ensures the builder has those skills and expertise."

He also points out that consumers aren't the only ones complaining. "For the MBA the biggest issue is the last payment. Clients often decide not to pay if they're unhappy with the work."





WA

Building Commission – 1300 489 099, bcinfo@commerce.wa.gov.au, buildingcommission.wa.gov.au (\$100 fee per complaint via online form)

Can

- Assess complaints and determine how best to approach resolution on a case-by-case basis
- Refer complaints about a builder's behaviour or disciplinary complaints to the Building Services Board

Need help?

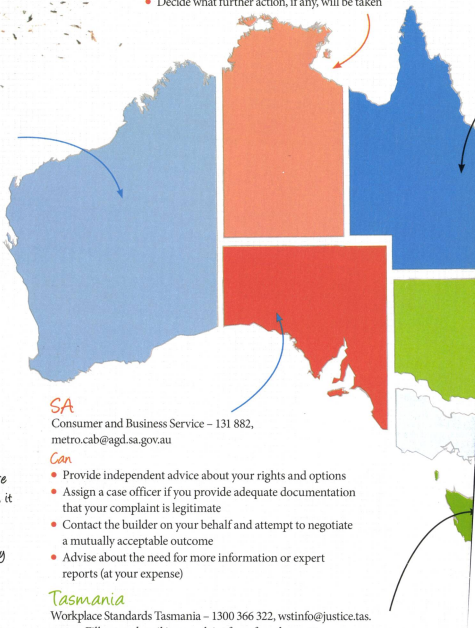
State and territory agencies have different ways of dealing with home-building complaints, but they all require homeowners to make an effort to work it out with the builder before asking the agency to step in. If mediation doesn't work, only the courts can impose legally binding decisions, and consumer protection agencies often won't get involved in contract disputes. However, the involvement of state authorities can persuade an unscrupulous builder to do the right thing. Complaints can only be made against licensed builders.

NT

For workmanship issues, Consumer Affairs – 1800 019 319; for builder conduct issues, Lands and Builder Control – (08) 8999 8985

Can

- Notify building practitioner of your complaint in writing and request a response
- Determine whether to dismiss a complaint or order a full investigation
- Decide what further action, if any, will be taken



SA

Consumer and Business Service – 131 882, metro.cab@agd.sa.gov.au

Can

- Provide independent advice about your rights and options
- Assign a case officer if you provide adequate documentation that your complaint is legitimate
- Contact the builder on your behalf and attempt to negotiate a mutually acceptable outcome
- Advise about the need for more information or expert reports (at your expense)

Tasmania

Workplace Standards Tasmania – 1300 366 322, wstinfo@justice.tas.gov.au. Fill out and mail in complaint form found at wst.tas.gov.au

Can

- Require an accredited building practitioner to make a formal response to a complaint
- Appoint an investigator to examine the complaint in detail
- Consider all evidence and advise you and the building practitioner of the decision in writing

Queensland

Queensland Building Services Authority – fill out Residential and Commercial Building Complaints form at www.bsa.qld.gov.au, 1300 272 272

Can

- Provide expert advice on how to resolve the matter between you and the builder for most jobs over \$3300, though some jobs are exempt from this threshold
- Perform site inspections if you and the builder fail to reach an agreement
- Set a timeframe for the builder to complete any areas requiring attention
- Have any repairs identified and recognised as a claim under a certificate of insurance
- Refer the case to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal if necessary

nsw

NSW Fair Trading – 13 32 20, fairtrading.nsw.gov.au

Can

- Mediate builder and homeowner disputes by comparing what the contract says to the work that's been done
- Send inspectors to the property to investigate complaints
- Claims can be settled at the Consumer, Trader and Tenancy Tribunal before involving a lawyer
- Impose fines and suspend or cancel building licences
- Legal help may also be available through the Home Building Advocacy Service if mediation fails. However, it's not free

ACT

Office of Regulatory Services, (02) 6207 3000, ors@act.gov.au

Can

- Investigate a building complaint if you've tried to resolve the matter yourself, provided documented evidence of the problem to the builder and kept detailed records, including receipts and correspondence. Legal action must not have already started and the complaint can't be handled by another agency. The dispute must be between a consumer and builder but not between two builders, or between a consumer and builder about a domestic, not commercial, project

Victoria

Consumer Affairs Victoria and the Victoria Building Commission jointly operate Building Advice and Conciliation Victoria, which takes consumer complaints – 1300 557 559

Can

- Mediate a voluntary dispute resolution process aimed at avoiding legal action
- Refer builders who refuse to fix defective work to the Building Practitioners Board
- Provide expert advice on how to resolve the matter between you and the builder
- Arrange technical inspections by a Building Commission inspector
- Recommend you take your dispute to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal if mediation fails

HOME BUILDING

- **Get recommendations from trusted friends and colleagues.** Is the builder licensed or registered? You can find out if any complaints have been lodged against them by checking their licence number with your state's consumer affairs office. Get the builder's details, including physical address, landline number and registered business name (and check on the ASIC website under "Company Search – National Names Index" that the company is registered and whether it has traded under a different name).
- **Ask to talk to some recent clients and see examples of the builder's work.** Who's doing the work? Will the builder be using the same crew? Get at least three quotes and make sure you and the builder are clear on what the quote covers – it may not cover the costs of the materials you have in mind, for instance.
- **Make sure your builder has a current certificate for domestic building insurance** before you sign any contracts if your project will cost more than \$12,000 in Victoria or \$20,000 in NSW. Cost thresholds for mandatory insurance vary from state to state. ■



Building a case

Lisa A's builder was approaching bankruptcy by mid-project and brought in unskilled workers and skimped on materials to cut down on costs. In effect, the builder used her money to help keep his business – and his other projects – going.

"He wasn't paying the skilled tradesmen, so those tradesmen quit," she says. "Then dodgy tradesmen showed up, and the workmanship went downhill. We had a clear contract with very detailed specifications. One floor was contracted to be put in for about \$10,000, but the builder got someone to put it in for about \$4000 and apparently used the extra \$6000 on some of his other projects."

Ending the contract would have meant more time, money and stress, so Lisa had little choice but to pay more for the work and materials than was originally agreed on. She later hired a lawyer and worked with the builder's insurer to make a claim. That meant \$500 an hour for the legal help and countless hours putting together a 1000-page document detailing the many differences between the specifications in the contract and how the project ended up.

ISTOCKPHOTO



A weighty business\$

Kate Browne investigates diet programs and uncovers confusing, sometimes bizarre advice as well as aggressive sales tactics

Australia now has the dubious honour of being one of the fattest nations on the planet, and the way things are going we may end up world champions. And as more Australians seek assistance in shedding those extra kilos, our weight loss industry is expected to benefit in 2012, with growth forecast at 2.3%, or about \$792 million this year.

How can a typical consumer find the right support, information and assistance amid all the fads, "medical" solutions and magic bullets? To get a taste of the variety of the dietary programs on offer, CHOICE sent three shadow shoppers to four national weight loss clinics. We then asked our panel of experts to weigh in on how these programs measure up. ▶

Meet the experts

Dr Alan Barclay is the Dietitians Association of Australia spokesperson. He has a PhD from the University of Sydney on the association between glycemic carbohydrate and the risk of developing lifestyle-related diseases such as type 2 diabetes

Melanie McGrice is an accredited practising dietitian who specialises in weight control. She's also director of Health Kick, a consultancy specialising in weight management and metabolic diseases

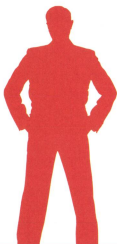
Dr Sam Hay is a GP who regularly sees patients with weight control issues. He also has postgraduate training in sports medicine, with a particular interest in lifestyle-modifiable conditions such as obesity and diabetes



THE CHOICE SHADOW SHOPPERS

**Emma**

Age: 25
Weight: 61kg
Height: 165 cm
BMI: 22.4 (healthy weight)
Waist measurement: 72cm

**Andrew**

Age: 28
Weight: 107kg
Height: 181cm
BMI: 32.7 (obese)
Waist measurement: 111cm

**Katherine**

Age: 40
Weight: 71 kg
Height: 169cm
BMI: 24.9 (healthy weight)
Waist measurement: 85cm
 Katherine is a lacto/ovo vegetarian

Weight Watchers

weightwatchers.com.au

Based on the ProPoints Plan, participants eat to an allocated number of points a day. Members can attend weekly meetings in person or join online. There are also several Weight Watchers Lifestyle Centres in selected department stores. Our shadow shoppers visited two Lifestyle Centres to ask about joining up.

Katherine was weighed, measured and talked through the program without being charged (although the consultant was very abrupt with her when she didn't join up on the spot).

Andrew visited two centres, was charged for both consultations and felt pressured to sign up.

Emma, who is only five kilos away

from being classified underweight, was refused any information about the program nor would the consultant weigh or measure her unless she agreed to commit and pay on the spot.

At no time did any consultants ask our shoppers about their medical history or check whether they were on medication. For Andrew, who works as a chef, the ProPoints system seemed too rigid as the consultant was not able to provide much information about how he would manage tasting dishes as part of his job in terms of measuring daily portions.

The experts' opinions

Our experts were disappointed by the



hard sell our shadow shoppers received and concerned that Emma was being pressured to sign up without being assessed as a suitable candidate.

The lack of emphasis on exercise was a concern for GP Dr Sam Hay, as was not checking on medication or medical issues. "While it's reasonable that these organisations don't comment on general health issues I would expect a screen for them," he says. "If [health issues] are present a request for the patient to consult their doctor to ensure they are all managed appropriately is recommended."

"The overall sales orientation appears to be an issue," says Dr Alan Barclay.





Cohen's Lifestyle Clinic

cohens.com.au



The Cohen's program is described as a rapid fat- and weight-loss diet. According to the US-based Dr Cohen, re-balancing hormones via the correct nutrition for each individual is critical to weight loss. After a blood test, each client "follows a diet precisely calibrated to meet their body's needs". The CHOICE shadow shoppers visited a clinic to make enquiries about joining up and attended a one-on-one information session with a Cohen's consultant.

Emma was told that, according to her height and shoe size, she ideally should weigh between 54-57kgs and could expect to lose up to seven kilos in two weeks. She was told she displayed symptoms of "obesity syndrome" such as bloating and low energy, and not to bother with exercise as it doesn't cause weight loss.

Andrew was not weighed or

measured, or asked what he weighed or if he was on medication. He says there was a lot of talk in the presentation about human growth hormone and obesity syndrome that didn't seem to make sense.

Katherine was told that the process of working out her personalised diet couldn't be divulged and that if she didn't follow the right "doses" of food she wouldn't lose weight. The consultant checked if she was on medication and told her about vegetarian options for the program. In terms of how much weight would be lost, Katherine was told that her body would "know" when it was at the right weight because "that's when you start to feel hungry". Katherine was also told that the blood test wasn't for hormones, as "that would be too expensive".

The experts' opinions

Our experts were unhappy with the advice from the Cohen's Clinic – "it

borders on irresponsible, misleading, and negligent, particularly when recommending such rapid and dramatic weight loss, especially in the case of someone [Emma] with an otherwise healthy weight," says Hay.

Barclay and Melanie McGrice say there is no such thing as "obesity syndrome" and are concerned by the statements about avoiding exercise. "Discouraging physical activity is not the type of recommendation a health professional should be making, and I can't believe she's using scare tactics for someone who is healthy into thinking that she has an 'obesity syndrome'", says McGrice.

Barclay says the amount and rate of weight loss on this program are of concern and that this kind of diet regime will lead to a loss of water and lean muscle mass, which can ultimately slow the metabolism.



Jenny Craig

jennycraig.com.au

jenny

Jenny Craig is a well-known international weight loss organisation, famous for its use of celebrity dieters. The program's philosophy is based on a kilojoule-controlled balanced diet via pre-packaged food. Once the participants are halfway to their goal weight they can then go on a program to shop and cook their own food.

The CHOICE shadow shoppers visited a variety of Jenny Craig outlets. All three found that the initial consultation was thorough, and provided free of charge. All three were measured, weighed and asked in detail about medication and health issues. They also provided an extensive vegetarian menu for Katherine when she asked about it.

The program and the fee structure were explained clearly, and the importance of

exercise discussed. All three shoppers felt there was no pressure to sign up on the spot, with the consultants happy to provide information so our shoppers could think about it.

On the downside, our shoppers believe the program can be a little restrictive if you like to cook your own food or, for someone like Andrew who works as a chef, unsuitable if you're tasting dishes in the kitchen.

For Emma, already at the low end of the healthy weight range, the consultant told her it's quite normal for young women to want to shed a

couple of kilos but advised she shouldn't lose more than three to five kilos.

The experts' opinions

Our experts were happy with the approach of Jenny Craig, particularly in terms of addressing health concerns, advice, options and a clear discussion of commitment and cost. However, Hay says "it's questionable advice that Emma was told her weight loss could be up to five kilos as this will give her a BMI of 20.5 – the cut-off to underweight is 20". Barclay says while the weight loss suggestion for Emma is just within the parameters of what's healthy, one could argue it's unnecessary.



Weight Control Doctor

weightcontroldoctor.com.au

Headed up by Dr Sandra Cabot, author of the best-selling *The Liver Cleansing Diet*, these clinics are in several locations around Australia. A number of naturopaths, doctors and herbalists have been trained by Cabot and claim to take a holistic approach to weight control.

All three shoppers attended a paid hour-long consultation at the Sydney clinic with a naturopath/weight loss consultant. All were asked extensive questions about their health and wellbeing, but none were weighed or measured.

Emma was asked her weight and told that while she didn't need to lose weight, she could follow a healthy eating plan. She was advised to avoid all grains and most fruit and to take protein supplements.

Andrew was advised to lose weight. He was told to cut out grains completely, eat five small meals a day and drink coconut milk for energy. Despite not being diagnosed with any specific health issues, the consultant was keen to sell him thyroid and liver supplements. Andrew says he was given a diet program that didn't include any portion guidance. "She told me to eat nuts, but what if I eat 10 kilos' worth?" he asks.

Katherine was given dietary advice such as avoiding dairy and eating more protein, but no portions were suggested. The consultant told her that as a vegetarian she'd find it difficult to lose weight, and suggested eating kangaroo. Additionally,

she diagnosed Katherine with hormonal, thyroid and adrenal problems and suggested these were contributing to weight gain. The consultant was also keen to sell Katherine more than \$100 worth of supplements. After the consultation, Katherine visited a GP who ran extensive blood tests that found none of the conditions diagnosed are present.

The experts' opinions

Our experts were alarmed by the advice given to our shoppers. "Factually incorrect, poor clinical assessments and misleading diagnoses have been made," says Hay. "This advice borders on being irresponsible, misleading, and negligent."

"It's no wonder there's so much confusion about what a healthy diet is when there are people providing dietary advice that is not evidence-based and can compromise people's health," adds McGrice.

Barclay says the kind of dietary changes suggested to our shoppers are not only inappropriate but also unsustainable. "Avoidance of wheat and dairy is typical advice from naturopaths. This kind of dietary pattern is rarely socially or culturally appropriate and will not be sustainable in the long term, leading to rebound weight gain and potential yo-yo dieting. The sale of proprietary supplements to make up for inherent nutrient deficiencies [due to the poor overall diet quality] is a common scam."

BIG COWS, FATTENING FRUIT & SLIMMING SLEEP

Here's a sample of just some of the stranger dietary advice our shadow shoppers were given out in the field. Our experts provide their counter-opinions.

Eat according to your blood type

There's no convincing scientific evidence to support the blood type diet.

Dr Alan Barclay

Exercise will not help you lose weight (even on a calorie-controlled diet)

Absurd. Body weight (or fat deposits) is a balance of energy in and energy out of the body. If more energy comes in, the body will store it as fat. If we burn more energy through exercise than we take in, the body uses the fat to meet the energy requirements.

Dr Sam Hay

Cow's milk is designed to turn little cows into big cows. If you don't want to turn into a big cow, don't have dairy

Milk, especially skim milk, is low in fat, low in kilojoules, rich in protein and very rich in a wide variety of nutrients.

Melanie McGrice

Don't eat fruit – it's full of carbs. Eat a protein bar instead

The brand of protein bar suggested has double the carbs of an average (150g) piece of fruit and three times the kilojoules.

Melanie McGrice

All weight loss occurs when you're sleeping

Although sleeping disorders have been shown to contribute to weight gain, there's no evidence to suggest all weight loss occurs at night.

Melanie McGrice

CHOICE verdict

If you're keen to lose weight, check out these practical first steps before signing up to any weight loss program. **Speak with your GP** Many offer weight loss and healthy lifestyle advice and can refer you onto a suitable health professional such as a dietitian. They can also do a health assessment and run any necessary tests.

Consult a dietitian University trained, all accredited practising dietitians can provide sound dietary advice, and many specialise in weight loss. If you have a chronic health problem such as diabetes or arthritis you may be eligible for a government rebate. Check for a dietitian in your area at daa.asn.au. **Check the credentials** If you're keen on a program, check it's a member of the

Weight Management Council of Australia (weightcouncil.org). Membership requires a rigorous assessment, including of the program or product, advertising material, consumer affairs processes, staff training and compliance. Weight Watchers Australia and Jenny Craig are members of the council. ■

Letting go

Ever wondered how best to get rid of stuff you no longer need? **Zoya Sheftalovich** spells out your options



It's been a few months since Christmas and that foot spa your aunt gave you is still languishing in the corner of the bathroom, yet to be used. The fondue set that seemed like a great idea at the time has joined the popcorn machine in the furthest recesses of the kitchen cabinet. And that beautiful but ill-fitting jacket you bought on sale but never wear is at the back of the closet. You don't want to send them to landfill, yet you can't return or re-gift them. So what can you do?

Going three times – sold!

Auctioning stuff online is an easy way to declutter your home, and one of

Australia's largest marketplaces is just a click away. While eBay is known by many as an auction site, the company has repositioned itself as something of an online department store. According to eBay, most of the items sold there these days are brand new and sold at a fixed price. But eBay still has a huge audience to offer those seeking to sell their unwanted things online.

Jenny Thomas, an eBay spokesperson, says there are several things a seller can do to maximise their final price. "If there's one thing I'd recommend it's to put as much written content in your listing as possible," she says. "If you're selling something second-hand with

bumps or scratches, make sure you mention that. People are more likely to bid if you've taken the time to put that detail in.

"And if you're selling something where looks are important, take photos of the item, the label, any marks or scratches. If you're selling electronics, take photos of the back of the item, including the stickers with product information and the barcode."

60%

The approximate percentage of "buy it now" items sold on eBay

80%

Approximate percentage of new items on eBay



to do business in print, list your items in your local paper's classifieds section.

Charity begins at home

There are plenty of people out there who'd appreciate those things you no longer use. But how do you connect with them? One option is using a recycling network.

Freecycle.org is one group operating free, individual micro-groups for areas around Australia. Just join the group local to you, then list those things you'd like to give away. Other group members will ask for the item and tell you why they'd like it, and you choose who to give it to. The successful Freecycler will then pick up your stuff.

A newcomer to the market, Ziilch.com.au, takes a different approach. Joining and using Ziilch is also free, but instead of signing up for local deals, the site operates on one platform for the entire country.

"You can swap things anywhere around Australia if you want," says company director Richard Milne. "The postage is worked out between users on a one-on-one basis, so we don't get involved. But we're looking to upgrade and improve on that component."

The best part of using recycling networks can be the joy of receiving as well as giving. Both Freecycle and Ziilch allow users to request items from other members. Ziilch also allows charities to join the site and request items of need. "Charities can take out a mini-page on the website and put out a call for things they want," says Milne. "For example, if there's a fire and they need furniture donations, or winter is coming and they need blankets, they can ask for those directly."

Givenow.com.au makes finding the charity that wants your stuff easy by categorising Australia-wide community organisations that accept donations of everything from clothes and food to cars

and football boots. "We try to keep our list as up to date as we can. It works as a pool system – we are happy for community groups to come to us and tell us what they're after too," says director Kylie Cirak.

The self-described "giving portal" also provides a commission-free cash donation service for thousands of community groups around the country. "Groups are paying a lot of money in fees to set up an account for online donations themselves," she says. "We do this for them for free and issue the receipts, which is a big saving for them as well." ■

eBay expertise

Best day and time for an auction

to end: Sunday evening, about 8pm when, according to Thomas, "people are at home, relaxing and net surfing".

Best starting price: In many cases, 99c. "If you're not sure about an item's value, start as low as possible," says Thomas. "It encourages people to get involved in your auction. And you might find they get so caught up in it, you get a better price. If you start it too high they can be put off."

Ideal auction length: Seven days.

"One week ensures people stay excited over a shorter period of time," says Thomas. "Less than that and you don't get two weekends; longer and people might get bored. That said, 10 days is great for items that need to be inspected before purchase, such as a car or bike."

Cost of an auction: Free to list up to 30 items in one month.

If an item sells, the seller pays eBay 7.9% of the final value, with a cap of \$49.95. Some items, such as cars, come under a different pricing structure.

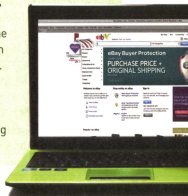
Going offline

Wary of selling over the internet? Don't worry – you can always join in at your local flea market or swap meet. If you're not averse to paying a commission, you can also contact an auction house near you. But if you settle on the classic garage sale, be sure to contact your local council to find out if they have any rules or regulations. There may be restrictions on signage for advertising the sale, or issues with taking up public footpath space.

Classified information

If you're more interested in a fixed price than an auction and would rather avoid paying commission, try a classifieds service. Gumtree.com.au, now owned by eBay, is one free site; Craigslist.com.au is another. If your item sells, you pocket the full amount.

Although no longer available on paper, the Trading Post is still kicking on at tradingpost.com.au. Listing most items for sale under \$500 is free, with charges ranging up to about \$20 for more expensive goods. But if you'd prefer



Shock to the system

Bill shock is supposed to be a thing of the past, but **Elise Dalley** finds plenty of lingering tremors

Despite a stern warning to the telcos by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) in September last year, massive phone bills and international roaming that costs as much as a night in a New York hotel continue to top the list of consumer complaints about mobile phone providers.

Bill shock remains a familiar experience for mobile phone users who don't have access to effective spend management tools. ACMA found in its *Reconnecting the Customer* report last year that inadequate billing information and weak spend management systems were the main causes of high bills.

The finding didn't surprise the Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN), which says mobile phone providers continue to sell limitless credit accounts to consumers

without providing adequate spend protection. "We see a mobile phone contract as personal finance, much like a credit card," says ACCAN spokesperson Elise Davidson.

"The banks would be in enormous strife with regulators if they were simply able to issue credit cards with no limits, which is essentially what mobile plans are."

Data disaster

Evelyn Wilton was greeted with a \$6500 phone bill in November after returning from a three-week holiday in Europe.

Before she left, Optus advised her to disable automatic email download and minimise internet usage to ensure her roaming spend did not spiral out of control. While Evelyn was aware costs were involved, she was unaware of the biggest trap

— data roaming. Even as her phone sat idle, her bill continued to rack up.

Evelyn tells CHOICE she would have expected Optus to explain the hidden cost of data for customers who choose to activate roaming and provide a notification system when costs climb beyond what a customer would normally spend.

Although Optus had introduced an SMS alert system designed to minimise customer bill shock from

international roaming in September 2011, Evelyn claims she did not receive any notification. "I would have appreciated it if they contacted me when my account hit the first \$1000 and warned me, so I could decide if I wanted to turn off roaming," she says.

In January, Optus agreed to reduce Evelyn's bill and provided her with information on how to switch off certain data-hungry apps (see choice.com.au/dataroaming).



Local controls

In *Reconnecting the Customer*, ACMA recommended companies introduce spend management tools that go beyond online monitoring systems and warned the industry to make voluntary changes or face new regulations.

In response, the telcos' peak body – the Communications Alliance – redrafted its code of conduct, which previously had not included an effective way to monitor the charges that accumulate during a billing period. The revised code, submitted for registration last month, now includes requirements for spend management tools, but Davidson is sceptical about the changes.

"All the Communications Alliance has done is tinker around the edges. Unfortunately we don't see the big-ticket reforms to spend management that we believe are needed to put power back in the hands of consumers."

Both Optus and Telstra now send SMS alerts to customers before they reach their monthly limit. Smaller carriers, however, including Vodafone and Virgin, still require customers to sign up to receive balance alerts.

ACCAN says the lack of real-time spend management notifications in the revised code fails to provide consumers with adequate protection. ACMA's decision on whether or not the code delivers the changes requested in *Reconnecting the Customer* had not been made at the time of publication.

Roam at your peril

While domestic spend management tools are the priority for ACMA, other stakeholders have focused on the murky and often excessive charges associated with international roaming. There

is no requirement for Australian providers to warn you of roaming charges when you're overseas, and many claim they're unable to provide real-time tracking due to a delay

between overseas networks and home carriers. But industry experts tell CHOICE there are a number of apps available that allow you to monitor real-time usage overseas. XVision's DataMan, for example, allows iPhone users to track

their data usage – the main concern when roaming with a smartphone – in real time, according to the company (we haven't trialled the product). XVision owner, Johnny Ixe, says the DataMan app tracks usage directly from the iOS mobile operating system rather than waiting for delayed network updates and is available for both domestic usage and roaming. DataMan offers a basic free version as well as a pro version for \$1.99 that includes real-time usage alerts.

There are a number of apps available that allow you to monitor real-time mobile phone usage while you're overseas

Optus and Telstra both provide an alert system for customers who are roaming but offer little information when you exceed your cap. This puts Australia somewhat behind the global trend. The EU, for instance, mandated in 2009 that all providers must send automatic alerts to customers who are about to incur roaming charges. The US Federal Communications Commission is currently considering similar steps.

While telephone calls and SMS are costly when overseas, the biggest sting comes from data. ACCAN recommends limiting your internet usage to Wi-Fi zones and protecting yourself by switching data roaming off on both your handset and by calling your provider. ▶



A capful of credit

CHOICE assessed popular cap plans for teenagers with the four carriers and found a number of key differences. While standard calls hover around 89-90c on all plans we looked at and the standard flagfall connection fee remains steady at 39-40c, data and credit inclusion varies widely.

The **Optus Turbo** and **Telstra Encore** caps both offer customers \$1000 worth of call and text credit for \$50, as well as a 2GB data allowance.

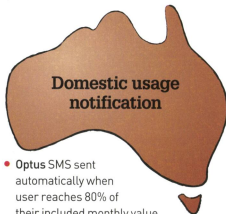
Vodafone tends to limit the use of flexible credit and allocate a large amount of the recharge value to own-

network calls. A \$49 recharge on the Vodafone Flexi cap, for example, also provides \$1000 of call and text credit but only \$350 worth of flexible call and text credit, with the remaining \$650 credit reserved for Vodafone-to-Vodafone calls. This option, however, offers 3GB data and unlimited access to social networking sites.

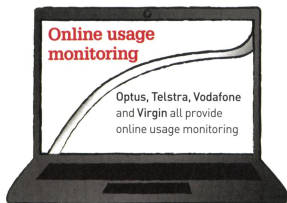
Although the **Virgin** \$49 cap recharge only offers customers \$800 of call and text credit, slightly less than Optus and Telstra, it does offer free Virgin-to-Virgin calls. Its cap plan includes 1GB data.



- **Optus** SMS sent within one hour of first use, with a prompt to disable. Further alerts every 15MB (about \$300) of usage if customers choose to proceed
- **Telstra** SMS sent to warn customers of the higher rates that overseas voice calls, SMS, MMS and data usage may incur
- **Vodafone** No automatic warning for customers who begin using data roaming when overseas. Customers can sign up to receive balance alerts that relate to their nominated spend
- **Virgin** No automatic warning for customers who begin using data roaming when overseas. Virgin provides customers with information when then manually switch it on



- **Optus** SMS sent automatically when user reaches 80% of their included monthly value
- **Telstra** SMS sent at 80% and 100% of monthly value. In coming months, data will be slowed rather than billed when a customer exceeds their limit
- **Vodafone** No automatic alert – customers must sign up to receive balance alerts
- **Virgin** No automatic alert – customers must sign up to receive balance alerts



ACMA's ultimatum

In its report, the telco regulator laid out the following recommendations for providers designed to minimise customers' bill shock:

- **An SMS or email notification to alert you** at a specific usage point, as well as a second alert when you reach 95% of your monthly allowance.
- **Access to more information from your salesperson about usage limits**, including the consequences of any contract limitations or exclusions, before entering into a contract.
- **A transition plan** until the formal alerts system is introduced. ■

Take cover



Driven to distraction by increasingly complex car insurance? **Brendan Mays** has your options sorted

An ever-expanding car insurance market is delivering more opportunity to customise your cover and find a lower price. However, the abundance of choice can also be a breeding ground for confusion, requiring a more sophisticated understanding of the things you need. ▶

Nutshell

- ▶ We review a total of 44 policies – our biggest ever car insurance comparison.
- ▶ Our scenarios are designed to help you find the right protection for the best price.

In this comparison, we look at policy features and premium prices across the market to make recommendations you can use to find the best deal. We also provide a features table (page 32) so you can compare policies for yourself at a glance.

Small claims

We asked insurers whether they would increase your premium for small claims under \$1000. Many declined to answer, while some said they wouldn't raise your premium at all. However, at least 16 brands said they would raise prices.

Once the excess payment, premium increase and potential discount reductions are accounted for, the cost

of a small claim can far outweigh any benefit you receive. As one CHOICE member commented online, "when some idiot keyed my car, it only cost

\$1200 to repair the damage, of which I paid \$600 in excess. My monthly premium then jumped from \$135 a month to \$355 per month and will continue to do so for two years until I build up my no-claim bonus again."

About 80% of Australians renew their car insurance to another provider – the figure is closer to 40% in the UK

Reckless renewal

According to Justezi.com.au, about 80% of Australians renew their car insurance

each year rather than switch to another provider. That figure is closer to 40% in the UK, which indicates we're less willing to shop around for a better deal.

Justezi.com.au and a range of other major online comparison sites are working to change this by providing online comparison services. "In our like-for-like comparisons, we found car insurance in the UK is 50% cheaper than in Australia," says David Issa, founder of Justezi.com.au "With plenty of savings on offer, it's worth shopping around."

What are you covered for?

One of the good things about car insurance is that there aren't too many outright exclusions that void your cover. You can't drive under the influence, use your car for motorsports or while getting paid to carry goods ▶

THE RIGHT POLICY FOR YOU

Our recommendations below are designed to save you time and money, indicating the best value for the policy features on offer. Simply find the category that most closely aligns with your individual needs, and look for the policies applicable in your state or territory.

Lowest cost

	Allianz	AAMI	Bingle	Coles	Progressive Direct
ACT	✓				
NSW			✓		✓
NT	✓		✓		
Qld		✓			✓
SA				✓	
Tas	✓				✓
Vic			✓		✓
WA				✓	



Price is the most important factor in this category. Policy scores are considered when pricing is similar.

Young driver

	AAMI	Allianz	ANZ	NRMA	Progressive Direct
ACT		✓			
NSW		✓		✓	✓
NT		✓	✓		
Qld	✓	✓			
SA		✓		✓	
Tas				✓	
Vic		✓		✓	
WA	✓			✓	



A driver with a lower-value vehicle and less driving experience. Only policies with a features score of 60 or higher are considered for recommendation.

History of accidents

	AAMI	Allianz	Real
ACT		✓	✓
NSW	✓	✓	✓
NT			✓
Qld	✓		✓
SA	✓		✓
Tas		✓	✓
Vic	✓		✓
WA			✓



If you've had an at-fault accident in the past few years, these are the most competitively priced policies with a features score above 65.

Recommendations are intended as a general guide only, and you must assess your individual needs before buying insurance. Policies, premium prices and other details are subject to change. We have not accounted for

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION RATINGS (%)

	Overall	Claims	Service
RAA	87		92
Shannons	83	90	83
Apia	75	78	81
Suncorp	75	90	73
AAMI	69	72	70
RACV	65	69	69
RAC	63	80	69
NRMA (A)	62	72	65
RACQ	62	66	64
SGIO	62		60
GIO	61	71	63
NRMA (B)	55		58
Allianz	53	61	53
QBE	53	60	47
CGU	50	62	51
Budget Direct	42		48

TABLE NOTES CHOICE surveyed 2453 participants. Only companies that received 30 responses or higher were included. Claims satisfaction scores are derived from people who have made a claim in the past five years (a blank space indicates insufficient data). (A) ACT, NSW, Tas. (B) Qld.

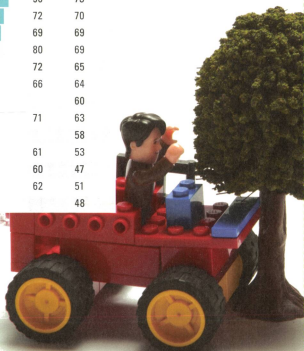
SERVICE PLEASE

Policies and premiums aren't the only factors to consider when choosing insurance. There's also customer service, and how your insurer will respond in the event of a claim.

The satisfaction ratings (left) indicate the percentage of people who rated their insurance "very good" or "excellent" in the listed categories. The RAA in SA topped the list, and specialist insurer Shannons also scored highly, with the greatest number of people rating them "excellent". Allianz scored well in our recommendations but 38% of respondents rated them only as "good", leaving them with a lower overall satisfaction rating.

If an insurer has multiple product tiers (as with RACV's Comprehensive and Complete Care policies), this has been combined into one overall score.

Remember, should a problem or dispute arise with your insurer, the Financial Ombudsman Service (fos.org.au) can adjudicate based on the circumstances of the event and your policy details.



Standard cover

	AAMI	Allianz	Real	NRMA
ACT	✓	✓	✓	✓
NSW	✓	✓	✓	✓
NT		✓	✓	✓
Qld	✓	✓	✓	✓
SA	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tas	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vic	✓	✓	✓	✓
WA	✓	✓	✓	✓



Best value policies with scores of 65 and higher. Suitable for those who want good cover but don't mind sacrificing some additional benefits. Insurers eligible for the top cover category have also been considered.

Top cover

	AAMI	NRMA	SGIC	Shannons	Suncorp	RACV
ACT	✓	✓				
NSW	✓	✓				
NT	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Qld	✓	✓		✓	✓	
SA	✓	✓	✓			
Tas	✓	✓				
Vic	✓	✓				✓
WA	✓		✓	✓		



Best value policies with a features score of 75 and higher. Suitable for those who require higher limits for things such as new car replacement and rental vehicle cover.

Older driver

	Real	AAMI	Allianz	NRMA	Suncorp
ACT	✓				
NSW		✓	✓		
NT			✓		✓
Qld		✓	✓		✓
SA			✓		
Tas			✓	✓	
Vic		✓	✓		
WA			✓	✓	✓



Best value policies for older drivers with a score of 65 and above. Total cover policies are included in this category.

Additional discounts (apart from no-claim discounts), which may increase the value of your cover. Youi, PAYD, 1Cover and Australian Seniors weren't considered for recommendation as we could not obtain pricing information.

or people. Personal property damage cover excludes cash and may also exclude jewellery, sporting equipment or mobile phones/electronics.

Otherwise, in addition to the limits set out in the table (right), you should be covered for:

- Theft, damage, accident, hail, storms, fire and flood
- Agreed value (only TIO and Virgin don't offer you this option; some place a limit on agreed value)
- Public liability
- 24-hour helpline (except Australia Post, Bingle, The Buzz and Youi)
- Lifetime repair guarantee (as long as you use an authorised repairer)
- No-claim discount protection (if available and you have the maximum no-claim discount).

The tricky part is the options and cover limits, which is where our scoring comes in.

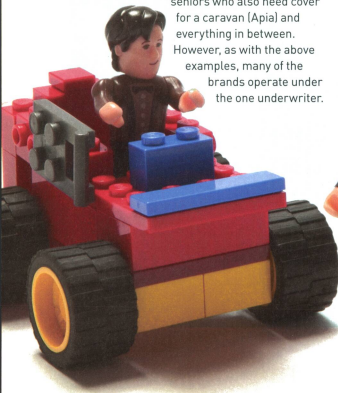
A lower score is not necessarily a bad thing if you only want basic cover, but bear in mind this may cost you more in the event of a claim. One strategy to avoid problems with cheaper cover is to have an emergency fund in case you need money for a hire car or a new windscreen. A higher score indicates more generous cover, but it may often cost more than the simpler budget options.

Always get a few quotes when you receive your renewal slip in the mail, and assess what excesses you'll have to pay. If you want the insurance to cover smaller claims, it may be worth lowering your excess and paying the additional premium. Otherwise, a higher excess can save you money up front. ■



Underwriter angst

There are a lot of insurance brands in Australia, and many different styles of product. We have specialised insurance for everyone, from young drivers and those with modified cars (such as Just Car Insurance) to seniors who also need cover for a caravan (Apia) and everything in between. However, as with the above examples, many of the brands operate under the one underwriter.



Suncorp and Insurance Australia Group (IAG) are two of the biggest, but what does this mean for the average consumer? In some cases it could mean your claims are processed in the same physical office as some other brands, or you could encounter products that are similar despite the brands being different. However, this is not always the case, and CHOICE customer satisfaction surveys

have found that brands mostly produce different results despite sharing an underwriter.

Questions about the state of competition in Australia have also been raised, but CHOICE generally observes a healthy, functioning car insurance market. In any case, when it comes to buying car insurance, it's the policy details that form the foundation and this is where you need to pay the most attention.

Insurer and policy

RACV Complete Care

Bankwest

IAG Comprehensive Plus (A)

Apia

Westpac

AAMI

ANZ

RAA

One Path

Shannons (B)

Bupa

CGU

St George

Suncorp

IAG Comprehensive (C)

RACT

RACQ

GIO

QBE

Budget Direct Gold

Myer

Real (D)

Comminsure

1Cover Prestige

TIO

Youi

Allianz SureCover Plus

Coles

Australia Post

Progressive Direct

Kmart

RAC

Virgin

The Buzz (E)

Bingle

TABLE NOTES We've introduced additional NSW, Old and Taxi, SGIC (SA) and SGIO (Vic), SGIC (SA) and SGIO (WA), (D) Real two-year replacement for other claims, (J)

		FEATURES												
available	Features score (out of 100)	Can pay monthly for no extra charge	\$0 excess for windshield claim	Benefit for trailer (\$)	Benefit for stolen keys (\$)	Choice of repairer*	New car replacement in case of write-off time limit (years)**	Rental car after theft covered**	Rental car after accident covered**	Free no-claim discount protection after a waiting period (years)	Personal items covered if car is stolen	Personal items covered if damaged in a claimable event	Personal property/valuables – overall limit (\$)**	Additional benefit or limit for baby capsules
except NT	87	✓	✓	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	1000	✓
	83	✓	Optional	1500	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional (K)	3	✓	✓	750	✓
	82	✓	✓	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	✓	1	✓	✓	500	✓
	81	✓		2000	0	✓	10 (H)	✓	Optional	3	✓	✓	1000	✓
	81	✓	Optional	1500	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional (K)	3	✓	✓	750	✓
	80	✓	Optional	750	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional	1	✓	✓	1000	✓
	79	✓	✓	1000	1000	✓	3	✓	Optional (K)		✓	✓	500	✓
	79	✓	✓	1000	500	✓	2	✓	Optional	✓	✓	✓	500	✓
	78	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	3	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	✓
	78	✓	✓	1000	2000	✓	1	✓		3	✓	✓	500	✓
except Tas	77	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	3	✓		2	✓	✓	500	✓
	77	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	3	✓		2	✓	✓	500	✓
	77	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	3	✓		2	✓	✓	500	✓
	77	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional	2	✓	✓	500	(L)
	76	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional	1	✓	✓	500	✓
	76	✓	Optional	500	500	✓	2	✓	Optional	5	✓	✓	500	(L)
	75	✓	Optional	750	750	✓	2	✓	Optional	✓	✓	✓	500	✓
	74	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional	1	✓	✓	500	(L)
	72	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2 (J)	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	(L)
	71	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional	2	✓	✓	500	✓
except NT	71	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	✓
	70	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	1	Optional	Optional	na	✓	✓	500	✓
	69	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	✓
	68	✓	Optional	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	✓
	67	✓	✓	1000	0	✓	1	✓		✓	✓	✓	300	✓
	66	✓	Optional	2500	0	✓	2	✓	Optional	na	✓	✓	750	✓
	65	✓	Optional	500	500	✓	2	✓	Optional		✓	✓	500	✓
	65	✓	Optional	750	1000	✓	1	Optional	Optional	2			na	✓
	64	✓	Optional	500	0	✓	1	✓	Optional	2		✓	250	✓
	62	✓	Repair only	500	0	✓	1	✓	Optional	na	✓	✓	500	✓
except NT	59	✓	Optional	750	500	✓	1	Optional	Optional	2			na	✓
	59	✓	(G)	1000	1000	✓	2	✓	Optional				na	✓
	57	✓	Optional	500	0	✓	1	✓	Optional	2		✓	250	✓
	50	✓	Optional	0	1000	✓		Optional	Optional	na			na	✓
	35	✓		0	0	✓				NA			NA	✓

ements in this year's scoring, but not all are contained in the table. * The consumer can provide a quote for consideration. ** Additional limits/conditions apply. (A) IAG Comprehensive Plus brands include NRMA (ACT, NT, VIC, WA), RACV received a separate score due to policy differences. (B) Shamrock is a specialist insurer for car enthusiasts/vintage car owners. (C) IAG Comprehensive brands include NRMA (ACT, NSW, Qld and Tas), RACV. (D) IAG Comprehensive brands include NRMA (ACT, NSW, Qld and Tas), RACV. (E) Scored on new policy about to be released. (F) Vic, NSW, ACT, NT, WA. (G) Max no-claim discount holders only. (H) 10-year replacement for theft, fire or total loss. (I) No-fault accidents receive hire car cover as standard. (L) Included in total sum insured. na Not applicable.



Details

of all products on review, including the percentage of fish, omega-3 content and fish species, can be found at choice.com.au/frozenfish

Catch of the day

Rachel Clemons trawls the supermarket freezers to find your best frozen fish options

What's not to love about fish? It's a source of protein, contains essential vitamins and minerals such as iron, zinc, iodine and vitamin B12, and is low in fat and saturated fat. Oily types are excellent sources of omega-3 fatty acids, which help reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke. And eating fish regularly may also reduce the risk of developing dementia and age-related macular degeneration.

The Australian Dietary Guidelines (currently under review) recommend we eat fish once or twice a week. But if heading out to the fishmonger each week isn't an option, keeping a pack or two of fish fillets or fingers in your freezer is a convenient alternative.

Freeze!

Frozen fish is quick and easy to prepare, and many varieties come marinated, seasoned or in sauce. The choice of fish species available is also broad, from

white fish such as barramundi, hake, hoki, Alaskan pollock and whiting to Atlantic salmon. And while fresh fish is generally better for flavour and texture, freezing retains nutrients so frozen fish can be just as nutritious.

Of course, the more fish in a product, the more of those beneficial nutrients you'll be getting, and not all fish species are naturally high in omega-3s. We reviewed more than 100 frozen seafood products – all the uncoated fillets, fillets with seasoning or sauce, battered and

75%

The highest fish content of all crumbed products we looked at

45%

The lowest fish content of all crumbed products we looked at

14

products we looked at contain less than 50% fish

\$211.5 million

The value of the frozen fish market in Australia*

crumbed fish and fish fingers we found in supermarket freezers. See What to Buy, right and page 37, for the standouts.

Reeling from nutrient claims

The government's National Health and Medical Research Council suggests a dietary target for long chain omega-3 fatty acids of 610mg per day for men and 430mg per day for women. Many products claim to be a "source of", "a good source of", or "rich in" omega-3s. But even though all the claims we reviewed conform to requirements of the Food Standards Code, actual omega-3 content can vary widely. Products claiming to be a good source range from 106mg to 4800mg of omega-3 per 100g, for example.

Only 15 products in our review have at least 430mg total omega-3s in a serve. You'd need to eat much more than a serve of many others to achieve your daily target – 16 Birds Eye Fish Fingers for men (and 11 for women), ▶

SUSTAINABLE SOURCES

Our seas, marine wildlife and habitats are significantly impacted by overfishing, damaging fishing methods and poor aquaculture practices, but choosing sustainably can be challenging.

While the claims you'll see on many frozen fish products such as "ocean caught", "wild caught" and "caught at sea" distinguish the product from farmed fish, they don't necessarily guarantee that the fish comes from sustainable sources (see *CHOICE*, Dec 11/Jan 12).

Here are our top tips for making sustainable seafood choices:

Look for the **Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)** certification logo on the packaging. The fish in MSC-certified products come from fisheries that meet international standards for sustainable fishing and seafood traceability. See msc.org.

Use the **Australian Marine Conservation Society's Sustainable Seafood Guide** (book, website or app), which classifies fish species as "better choice", "think twice" or "say no". See sustainableseafood.org.au.

Ask your fishmonger or at the supermarket deli counter if they sell sustainable seafood.

WHAT TO BUY

BEST FOR OMEGA-3s

These products contain more than 2000mg omega-3s per serve

- 01 **Birds Eye** Atlantic Salmon Lemon Pepper
- 02 **Birds Eye** Atlantic Salmon Skinless Fillets
- 03 **Birds Eye** Atlantic Salmon Provencale
- 04 **Ocean Royale (Aldi)** Lemon Pepper Atlantic Salmon
- 05 **Ocean Royale (Aldi)** Natural Atlantic Salmon

- 06 **Petuna** Atlantic Salmon Kebabs Lemon & Pepper
- 07 **Tassal** Premium Tasmanian Salmon Salmon Fillets
- 08 **Tassal** Premium Tasmanian Salmon Sundried Tomato and Basil
- 09 **Woolworths Select** Lemon & Dill Salmon Fillets



For more
fish recipes from
Fiona and Gene, go
to [choice.com.au/
cooks-choice](http://choice.com.au/cooks-choice)



Crumbed fish recipe

INGREDIENTS

- 2 x 150g fish fillets (ling, whiting, flake, flathead)
- ½ cup plain flour, seasoned (salt and pepper)
- 1 egg, beaten, place in a wide bowl
- 1 cup Japanese (panko) breadcrumbs, placed in a flat baking tray
- Peanut oil

METHOD

- Dry fish with paper towel.
- Place fish and seasoned flour in a plastic bag. Shake the bag gently to coat the fish then remove fish and shake off excess flour.
- Place fish into egg, turning to coat both sides.
- Place fish into breadcrumbs, turning to coat both sides.
- Place fish onto a plate and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes; this sets the crumbs which helps to keep them on the fish when frying.
- In a deep pan, saucepan or deep fryer, add enough oil to fill a quarter of the way up the pan.
 - Heat the oil on a medium to high heat. Check to see

the oil is at the right temperature by dropping in a few breadcrumbs. If the oil bubbles around the crumb, you know it's at the right temperature. If the oil is smoking, you've gone too far – reduce the temperature and remove from the heat until it has cooled slightly.

- Gently place the fish into the oil. If making a larger batch, do this a couple of pieces at a time. Don't crowd the pan as the oil can boil over.
- Cook for three to four minutes until the breadcrumbs turn a golden brown colour, then turn the fish over for another two to three minutes.
- Place cooked fish onto a tray lined with absorbent paper before serving.

TIP

Homemade or packet breadcrumbs can be used as an alternative. If making a large quantity, keep fish warm in an oven on 100°C.

for example – despite their claim to be a “good source” of omega-3. So check the nutrition information panel rather than simply the claims if you're buying fish just for its omega-3s.

Sustainable-fishing claims are also abundant, appearing on more than half of all products in our review. But not all guarantee that the fish in the pack comes from sustainable sources. See Sustainable Sources, page 35, for more.

The cost of convenience

It's handy to have pre-marinated, seasoned or crumbed fish pieces in the freezer, but you'll pay for the convenience. For example, we paid \$10.99 for a 250g pack of Woolworths Select Lemon & Dill Salmon Fillets, which works out at \$43.96 per kilo. We could have saved by buying fresh Tasmanian Atlantic salmon fillets (\$28.99 per kilo), also boned and skinned, from the same supermarket's deli counter, and made our own lemon butter sauce using some common, inexpensive ingredients (see our recipe below).

Buying fresh fish and making your own marinade or sauce may also appeal

lemon butter sauce

Ingredients (Serves 2)

- Juice of 1 lemon
- 2 tablespoons cold butter, roughly chopped
- 1 tablespoon fresh herbs (dill, parsley, tarragon)
- Season with cracked black pepper (optional)

Method

- Add lemon juice to a pan, heat gently.
- Whisk in butter and herbs of choice, bring to a simmer for about 1 minute.
- Pour over fish.

Tips Lemon butter sauce can be served with any fish.



WHAT TO BUY

CRUMBED/FLAVOURED PRODUCTS – MOST FISH

All plain, uncoated fillets and the What to Buy products on page 35 contain 90% or more fish. But if you're after ready crumbed and/or flavoured white fish – and lots of it – these products contain the most. You'll see that all have 75% or more fish:

- 01 **I&J Flame Grills** Garlic & Parmesan (84%)
- 02 **I&J Flame Grills** Lemon Pepper & Garlic (84%)
- 03 **Birds Eye SteamFresh** Garlic & Spring Onion Fish Fillets (78%)
- 04 **Birds Eye SteamFresh** Lemon & Parsley Fish Fillets (78%)
- 05 **Birds Eye SteamFresh** Thai Coconut Curry Fish Fillets (78%)
- 06 **Birds Eye** Lightly Seasoned Garlic & Parsley (75%)

to your tastebuds when you compare ingredients such as fresh butter, lemon juice and herbs with the maltodextrin, dehydrated vegetable, lemon juice powder, yeast extract, colour and other items that make up the lemon and dill flavouring for the Woolworths Select product.

Mercury rising

Some fish species contain more mercury than others because they are long-lived fish or predators, which can accumulate higher levels of mercury by eating other fish. As mercury can affect the nervous system – particularly the developing nervous system in unborn babies – you should limit these species in your diet, especially if you're pregnant.

Food Standards Australia New Zealand recommends that pregnant women, women planning pregnancy and young children eat shark (flake), marlin and swordfish (broadbill) no more than once a fortnight and not eat any other fish during that fortnight. Orange roughy (deep sea perch) and catfish should be eaten no more than once a week, and no other fish should be eaten that week. As for the rest of us, we should only eat shark, marlin or swordfish once a week and no other fish that week. ■

- 07 **Birds Eye** Lightly Seasoned Lemon & Cracked Pepper (75%)
- 08 And for kids, the fish fingers with the most fish at 64% are **Woolworths Select Fish Fingers**.

Jargon buster

"Formed" or "joined" fillets are portions cut from frozen blocks of compressed fish fillets and/or mince in such a way that they appear to be natural fillets, although all are the same size and shape.

Beer? If you're expecting to find real beer in beer batter you'll be sorely disappointed. The beer-battered products in our review contain either beer extract or beer flavour.

Fish species high in omega-3s include Atlantic salmon, gemfish, mackerel, mullet, rainbow trout, sardines and tinned fish such as pink and red salmon and sardines.

Salt overload A single fillet of Kingfisher Lemon Pepper Snapper Fillets has 1104mg sodium – 120% of an adult's daily sodium requirement.

The origin of species?

Making sustainable seafood choices is hindered by confusing claims such as "made in Australia from imported and local ingredients" and "processed in Vietnam from Sea Farmed



Barramundi from the Pacific Ocean region". We want Australian governments to improve country-of-origin labelling on food for retail sale. See choice.com.au/country-of-origin-labelling for more.

FINANCIAL
 Business Council warns Australia is losing capacity to
 High cost



Dr Google is in

Searching for medical information online can sometimes do more harm than good, says **Karina Bray**

It's estimated about 60-80% of people use the internet to search for health information. However, among all the great sites on the web there is some real rubbish, with a large amount of unregulated information and significant issues with quality, accuracy and completeness of information.

Here are some questions to help you identify reliable health information so you can tell the good from the bad.

Who's responsible?

Find out who is providing the content and evaluate their authority to do so. The About

Us page on most sites should provide this sort of information. Check whether it's a government body (such as the Department of Health), professional organisation (such as the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists), not-for-profit institution (such as the Heart Foundation), university, commercial organisation, individual health professional or just an enthusiastic layperson. Government bodies, medical professionals' associations, relevant institutions and universities may be more reliable options because they have higher levels of accountability.

Are they contactable?

Can you contact the organisation or the webmaster? Ideally a physical address

and phone number will be listed, or at least email addresses. Be wary if the site provides no contact information or if you can't easily find out who runs it.

Is it current?

Health and medical information is constantly being revised and updated as new research adds to current knowledge and understanding, so it's important to check content is recent and up to date. Look for clues about when the information was updated – this could be a date saying when the text was created, posted or updated. If there's no date, try some of the links – if they're broken, the page might be quite old.



Are they qualified?

The About Us page can tell you whether there's an editorial board or committee with appropriate credentials – ideally qualifications and expertise in the specific area of health or medical topic/s featured on the site.

It's not uncommon for the work of apparently reputable people – doctors, professors and so on – to feature on health information websites. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're qualified to advise on the topic at hand. For example, information on vitamin C and its purported benefits for preventing colds and curing cancer is often linked with the work of "Nobel laureate Linus Pauling". However, Pauling's two Nobel prizes had nothing to do with vitamin C, colds or cancer. Similarly, someone with a PhD

reviewed medical journals? Claims such as "ground-breaking research has found..." should be accompanied by a reference to research groups, study leaders or a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal so you can verify the findings. If the information appears to be opinion rather than fact, is the writer qualified to give it?

Who's funding the site?

Check to see if the site is funded by government agencies, charities or foundations, donations, a business or commercial advertising. Ads should be clearly defined. It's not uncommon for drug manufacturers to produce websites about conditions related to the medications they sell, and promoting the medication itself. That's not a bad thing, but it's worth

Double-check any advice given on treatments and management with a qualified health professional

can use the title "Dr", but if their PhD is in English literature, they're not a medical doctor qualified to advise on managing atherosclerosis.

Online forums can provide a useful support network of people with similar medical conditions or concerns, and contributors or modifiers shouldn't necessarily be expected to have formal qualifications. However, valuable as such forums are for comfort and support, they can be a source of rumours, myths, misleading information and quackery, so double-check any advice given on treatments and management with a qualified health professional.

Is the information reliable?

Be clear about whether the information is fact or opinion. If fact, are sources noted or acknowledged? Are these reputable sources such as government statistics, World Health Organization data or papers published in peer-

reviewed medical journals? Claims such as "ground-breaking research has found..." should be accompanied by a reference to research groups, study leaders or a paper published in a peer-reviewed journal so you can verify the findings. If the information appears to be opinion rather than fact, is the writer qualified to give it?

What's the privacy policy?

Health information should be confidential. Read the privacy policy to see what information they're collecting, how they're using it and who they're sharing it with. Be wary of providing personal details such as home address, date of birth, mother's maiden name and credit card details.

Are they complementary medicines?

Companies producing marketing and advertising information about pharmaceutical medicines are subject to rules and regulations about what can and can't be said, and there are industry and regulatory bodies that hold them to account – at least to some extent. Because complementary and alternative medicines and therapies aren't as tightly regulated as conventional pharmaceuticals, some companies and practitioners promoting their use tend to overstate the benefits and downplay risks and uncertainties. ▶

AN APP A DAY

There are hundreds of health and medicine apps for iOS and Android platforms. Here are some that we believe provide useful information from reputable sources.



Better Health Channel

has health and medical information about conditions and diseases, their

symptoms, treatment options, management and care. It also has first aid, medical and health agencies contact information and, for Victorians, additional health services location info. (iOS only; free)



First Aid by St John Ambulance Australia

won't teach you first aid, but does gives basic information

for novices and is a good refresher for those who've done a first aid course. It may be useful to have on hand in an emergency situation. (iOS only; \$4.49)



Medicines List

by the National Prescribing Service allows you to keep a list of medicines

you're taking, with scheduling and reminder alarms. The list can be printed or emailed as a PDF from the app. (iOS only; free)



WebMD

provides a symptom checker as well as information on a large range of conditions,

medicines and first aid. (iOS and Android; free)



This is particularly so online, where anyone anywhere in the world can say just about anything they wish extolling the virtues of their products and services with little fear of retribution.

There are several warning signs to watch for – and these apply to all health and medicine

sites – such as claims that one remedy will cure a variety of illnesses, that it's a "medical breakthrough" or that it contains a "secret ingredient". Relying on testimonials as "evidence" and vague references to unsourced "clinical research" are other warning signs. As always, check whether the site is trying to sell you something and consult a qualified health professional before trying anything new. ■

WORTH LOGGING ON

HealthInsite healthinsite.gov.au

This Australian government internet gateway allows you to search for information on conditions, diseases, general health and wellbeing, as well as the latest health news and services. It then directs you to one or more of its partners – all of which meet prescribed criteria for quality – which provide the information.

Better Health Channel

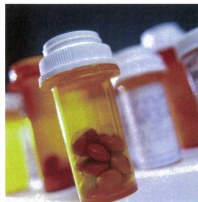
betterhealth.vic.gov.au

This provides quality-assured, reliable and up-to-date health, medical and healthy lifestyle information from its content partners that's also easy to understand. There are no commercial ads or corporate sponsorship, and it's also a HealthInsite partner.

National Prescribing Service

nps.org.au

A government website with everything you need to know about medicines – prescription and over-the-counter.



MedlinePlus

nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/

MedlinePlus is a comprehensive, evidence-based resource for all things medical. Under Health Topics there is information on symptoms, causes, treatment and prevention for more than 900 diseases, illnesses, health conditions and wellness issues. It offers factsheets on medicines and complementary and alternative medicine supplements. It also provides background about the traditional and proposed uses of alternative medicines, warnings and dosage information, as well as reviewing evidence of their efficacy based on clinical research, often with specific references to studies. The information and links are regularly reviewed and updated.

ABC Health News

abc.net.au/health/healthnews

Keep up to date with the latest health news sourced from ABC TV and radio, presented in a consumer-friendly fashion. You can also subscribe to an email digest with the week's highlights.

Health on the Net www.hon.ch

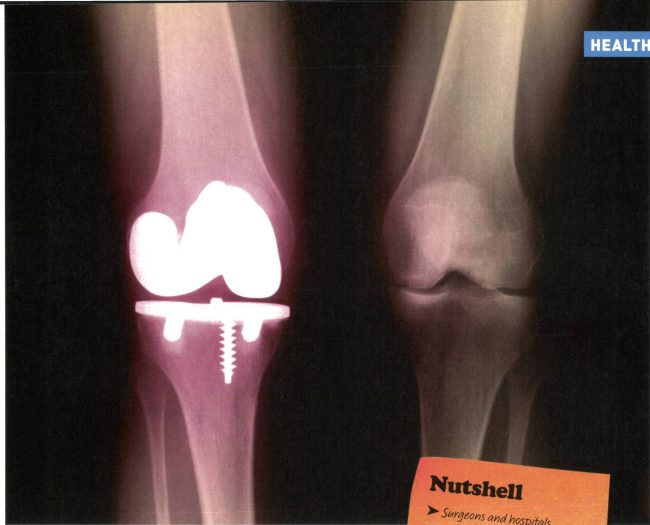
The Health on the Net (HON) foundation is a Swiss-based not-for-profit organisation established in 1995 in an attempt to guide health professionals and consumers worldwide to reliable health information on the net.

To be HON certified, sites must:

- Indicate the qualifications of the authors
- Contain information that supports, not replaces, the doctor-patient relationship
- Respect the privacy and confidentiality of personal data submitted to the site by the visitor
- Cite the source(s) of published information and date medical and health pages
- Back up claims relating to benefits and performance using rigorous sources and in a balanced manner
- Present material clearly and provide email addresses for content contacts and the webmaster
- Identify funding sources
- Clearly distinguish advertising from editorial content

If you come across a page with the HONcode logo displayed, it indicates the site meets HON criteria for reputable information. You can also search HON for information and it will direct you to websites carrying the logo. It's not an iron-clad guarantee of quality, however, and there have been concerns raised about inappropriate content – perhaps placed after the use of the logo was initially awarded. If you see pages with the HONcode logo that you feel don't meet its quality criteria, let them know at honcodecomplaint@healthonnet.org.





Joint failure

Given the recall of faulty joints implanted in thousands of patients, **Uta Mihm** looks into the true price of prosthetics

If you're waiting for hip or knee replacement surgery, you may end up serving as a guinea pig for prosthetic devices that haven't been clinically tested. And the device fitted can differ depending on your surgeon and hospital and whether you are a private or public patient.

These issues were highlighted in a Senate inquiry late last year that looked into a recent medical scandal. Between 2004 and 2009, 5500 Australian patients were implanted with two now-recalled DePuy hip replacement devices (see page 43). To date, up to 13% of those patients needed revision surgery to replace the

faulty prosthesis, more than double than for hip replacement devices generally – and those figures are expected to go up.

Trial by error

Last year's Senate inquiry into medical devices asked the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) to change the way it lists new prostheses in Australia – and for good reason. Currently, no clinical testing is needed for the TGA to list a hip or knee replacement device in Australia. In approving the DePuy devices, the TGA relied on British information, based on laboratory testing. In the US, one of the DePuy devices

Nutshell

- Surgeons and hospitals sometimes have affiliations with device manufacturers, which could create a conflict of interest.
- Two hip prostheses have been recalled, with several patients now needing painful revision surgery.

couldn't be listed without clinical testing, but this trial was abandoned and DePuy subsequently withdrew its application for listing.

Between 2003 and 2007, 260 new devices for hip and knee replacement surgery were released in Australia, according to the National Joint Replacement Registry (NJRR), which tracks the performance of hip and knee prosthetics in this country. Three-quarters of these were used on fewer than 100 of the roughly 80,000 hip and knee surgery patients per year and so their performance was difficult to assess. Of the rest, none ▶

BREAST IMPLANT SCARE

About 5000 Australian women with recalled breast implants are likely asking why they weren't given more information about what was being surgically implanted in their bodies. The implant in question, the Poly Implant Prothèse (PIP), does not contain medical-grade silicone but rather industrial-grade silicone designed for making mattresses. On average, about 10% of silicone breast implants rupture within 10 years of being implanted. In countries such as France and Germany, women have been advised to have PIP implants removed, with reports pointing to them having an even higher rupture rate. The TGA has come under fire for not yet following suit. It says it's examining PIP implants used in Australia and is involved in international collaborations. There is a helpline for concerned patients – 1800 217 257.

performed better than what was already available, and 30% performed "significantly worse," according to NJRR director Professor Stephen Graves.

The Australian Orthopaedic Association (AOA), which established the NJRR, recommends introducing two-year clinical testing before a new device can be listed. The NJRR reveals that factors such as age, gender, individual diagnosis and the type of prosthesis and surgical techniques can determine the success of a hip or knee replacement surgery and longevity of the device. So it's crucial that your surgeon takes your specific circumstances into account when deciding which devices to use.

Limb lottery

The hip or knee replacement device that's selected for you may vary depending on the surgeon you use and whether you're a private or a public patient.

"In the public sector, different hospitals have been able to mandate the use of different prostheses – they might have an agreement with a provider," says Cindy Shay, group general manager of provider relations at Medibank Private.

Price is a major factor for the public system, says Graham Mercer, president of the AOA. "The difficulty with the public system is that they will look for the cheapest possible prosthesis."

If you're a private patient, your surgeon may have greater choice of prostheses. However, your surgeon's experience with different devices can limit the choice. Some consumers who were implanted with the failed DePuy devices asked their surgeon for a

5500

The number of patients in Australia who had the faulty DePuy hip devices implanted

80,000

The approximate number of hip and knee replacements performed in Australia per year

80%

The proportion of hip replacements still functional after 20 years

Timeline

2004

2005

2007

2008

2009

Early 2004 to early 2005 Two Johnson & Johnson (J&J) DePuy devices approved by TGA for use in Australia

2007-2009 NJRR warns TGA and J&J 17 times about problems with the devices

- Sep 2007 J&J agrees with TGA to supply one of the devices only to surgeons who undergo further training
- Dec 2009 Voluntary Australia recall of the DePuy devices

specific hip replacement device but were not given their choice.

Potential conflicts of interest may also arise. Consumers told the Senate inquiry they were concerned that "there may have been inducements paid to doctors or hospitals to favour particular prostheses". While the Senate committee noted the various codes of conduct that regulate such practice, such as that of the AOA, it also noted that Johnson & Johnson, the makers of the DePuy devices, had to pay high penalties in the US and UK because of improper payments to health care providers.

The Senate inquiry called on the Department of Health and Ageing to "address the issue of inducements paid by pharmaceutical companies and medical device manufacturers to doctors and teaching hospitals". The track record of the device chosen by your surgeon is often not clear since prostheses don't come with consumer information sheets like pharmaceuticals do. The Consumers Health Forum is calling for "post-market surveillance and a national register for all prostheses so that consumers can be given high-quality, independent information before a device is implanted".

If that information had been available to consumers before they were implanted with the failed prostheses, they may have

been spared a lot of pain. Problems with the DePuy devices were evident since at least 2007, two years before they were recalled.

CHOICE verdict

The Senate inquiry and several other regulatory reviews currently being implemented should go some way toward improving TGA processes. However, several important issues, such as a lack of registries like the NJRR for many other devices, have not yet been addressed. The effects of shortcomings can be seen in the recent case of the PIP breast implants (see opposite) where no registry like the NJRR exists.

CHOICE wants consumers to be given comprehensive information about the devices selected for them. Only then can you make an informed decision and know

Questions to ask your surgeon

- Is surgery really needed now?
- Is there anything I can do to delay it?
- Is there anything I can do to improve the outcome? For example, what type of exercises could I do to strengthen and tone relevant muscle groups? Should I lose weight?
- Which device is used? What is it about this device and my body that makes it the best option? Are there alternatives available?
- How long has this device been used and what is the track record on patients similar to me? Do you have an affiliation with the manufacturer of the device or any other conflict of interest?
- What track record do you have regarding this particular surgery?
- If you're a private patient, ask about any out-of-pocket costs with the device or surgery.
- If in doubt, consider getting a second opinion.

whether the device has any track record worth knowing about. ■

DePuy debacle

Bob had a faulty hip prosthesis implanted in 2008 when he was 63 years old. After his revision surgery removed tumours and inserted bone grafts, he says he now lives in pain "24 hours a day, seven days a week".

Patients with faulty devices can experience swelling, pain and problems with walking, which may be caused by the device loosening, the fracture of a bone around the device or dislocation of a part of the prosthesis.

The DePuy devices have metal ball-and-socket components that move against each other, and can release small particles of heavy metals such as cobalt and chromium that have been associated with a number of health problems. There is concern about the same problem happening with other metal-on-metal prostheses.

Two class actions against DePuy are currently underway on behalf of affected patients.

2010

Aug 2010 Voluntary worldwide recall of the DePuy devices

Ask the Experts

Got a niggling question our team can help with?



Brendan Mays

How do insurance companies set their premiums? Mine seem to go up every year, no matter what.

CHOICE finance expert Brendan Mays replies:

Many types of insurance are risk-rated, including car insurance (see page 29). This means insurers consider a number of factors when calculating premiums, and it can leave you feeling bamboozled if your costs increase but nothing else seems to change. From the crime level in your neighbourhood to an insurer's

balance books, almost anything can affect the premium you're charged.

You do have one major advantage as a consumer – insurers want your business. They know plenty of people simply pay their renewal slip without too much thought, and therefore want to attract business with a low initial offer, locking in customers willing to tolerate higher prices down the track. By shopping around for suitable cover each time you get a renewal notice (and many will honour your existing no-claims discounts and other benefits), you can use the market to your advantage and potentially save hundreds.

A local repairperson told me front-loader washing machines have higher breakdown rates. Is this true, and once you count production costs, are front loaders really more efficient than top loaders overall?

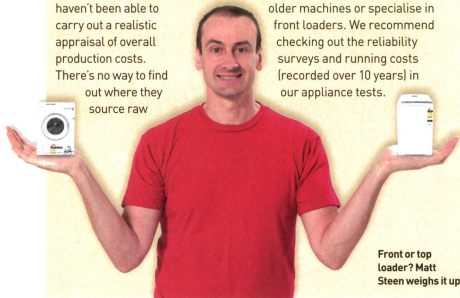
CHOICE washing machine expert Matthew Steen replies:

Due to privacy clauses in manufacturer/supplier contracts, we haven't been able to carry out a realistic appraisal of overall production costs.

There's no way to find out where they source raw

materials from, where fabrication of each individual part is carried out, costs of transport and labour costs of all areas.

Respondents to our most recent product reliability survey (see *CHOICE*, March 2011) rate reliability of front loaders and top loaders almost equally, so your repairperson may be seeing some older machines or specialise in front loaders. We recommend checking out the reliability surveys and running costs (recorded over 10 years) in our appliance tests.



Front or top loader? Matt Steen weighs it up

During the Boxing Day sales, I went into two city computer game stores to buy a 4GB Xbox, advertised at \$188 until 8 January. They were out of stock indefinitely and the next models up cost more than \$100 extra. Sales assistants were unhelpful until I pushed the issue, but eventually found one in a suburban store (which I then had to pick up). Are they allowed to advertise without having enough stock?



CHOICE consumer law expert Zoya Sheftalovich responds:

Companies that advertise special prices have a legal responsibility to ensure a reasonable quantity of the item is available

for customers to purchase for a reasonable period. Bait advertising is when a shopper goes in to buy an advertised discounted product only to find it isn't available, and the shopper is encouraged to buy a higher-priced product instead. While it's hard to determine what is a reasonable amount of stock, it sounds as though one of the city stores should have had a \$188 Xbox (or have been planning to get some in).



Zoya Sheftalovich

Ask us

Do you have a question for one of CHOICE's experts? Email us at asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to us at Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204.

Lab Tests

Tablet computers, child car restraints and induction cooktops – they're all on test here



Testing playpens is child's play for CHOICE's Matthew Tung

46 Tablet computers

Join the revolution with our top-rated models

50 Future technology

The latest in TV and gadget developments

54 Digital radio tuners

Interference-free reception will be music to your ears

58 Fridges

We peek into an 800L behemoth

63 Induction cooktops

Cooking with magnets? It's not as strange as it sounds

67 Benchtop ovens

The best models for when space is an issue or you're on the go

69 Child car restraints

Whether they're newborns or toddlers, we've got yours safely seated

72 Playpens

Which ones best contain your eager young explorers?

CHOICE. The People's Watchdog

CHOICE's experienced technical staff puts products through their paces in our own testing laboratories. We use test methods based on Australian standards and develop our own to match the way consumers use a product in their homes. We buy the products we test, maintaining our independence from manufacturers and so we know what you're faced with in the shops. We've checked the models are available at the time we publish. Our recommendations are based on a product's quality and performance, with no hidden bias.



CHOICE Shopper
For the best deal on products where you see this logo, call 1300 360 655. Have the model name and number, the price you've been quoted and your CHOICE subscriber number.



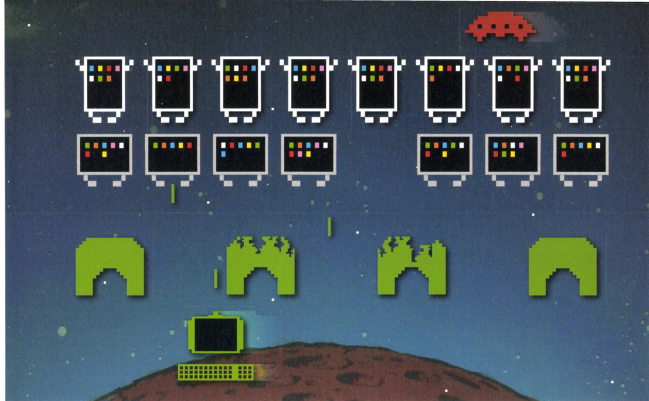
CHOICE Online
Wherever you see a mouse icon, there is more information about this test at choice.com.au.



CHOICE Best Buy
Our testers award a product a Best Buy if it delivers high quality at a comparatively low price. Not every test report includes Best Buys.



CHOICE Green Buy
Our researchers award a Green Buy to a product that delivers good quality and environmental performance. Not every test report includes Green Buys.



The time of the tablet

The question is no longer whether tablets will take off, but whether PCs will survive their arrival. **Ben Bridges** looks at a host of newcomers

Tablets are the biggest growth area for personal computers, with worldwide sales projected to be more than 100 million this year. And the Apple iPad is still the benchmark, with 60-70% of the global market – but there's no shortage of challengers fighting for second place.

The iPad's 2011 market share is actually down from 84% the previous year, eroded mainly by opposition running Google's Android operating system. Because Android tablets come from a variety of manufacturers, they also come in a variety of shapes and sizes, usually between 7" and 10". In some cases they also come with experimental features such as detachable or foldable keyboards, blurring the line between tablets and netbooks.

Few tablets run Windows 7, which is not designed for them, but Microsoft hopes its upcoming Windows 8 will bring it back into the game. The OS is being designed for touchscreens and to work across all platforms, from PCs and

laptops to tablets and even smartphones, with smooth operability between them – but it won't be out until 2013, long after the upcoming iPad 3 has hit our shores.

Meanwhile, HP is out of the race.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

Netbooks Tablets were supposed to sound the death knell of netbooks, but reports of their demise are somewhat exaggerated. Netbooks still offer the lowest-cost entry into the conventional laptop arena. You can buy a 10" netbook with 250GB storage for about \$250.

Ultrabooks A more serious challenge to tablets is ultrabooks – thin, light and relatively low-cost laptops designed to be super-portable and have excellent battery life, like a tablet, but with the speed and features you'd expect from a full laptop. Think of a Windows version of the MacBook Air. They also have data protection built into them at the

hardware level, making them virtually useless to anybody but the owner and a poor target for theft. The ultrabooks category is being pushed hard by Intel, which missed out on the tablet revolution completely. They are starting to hit retail shelves now and dozens more are on the way over the next few months from big names such as Acer, Asus, HP, Lenovo, LG, Toshiba and Samsung.

E-readers are fighting a rearguard action, gaining capabilities to take them beyond mere ebook readers. Leading the charge are Amazon's Kindle Fire (not available here yet) and the Nook Color, offering colour touchscreens and even

WHAT TO BUY



83%-81%

Apple iPad 2 (all models)
\$579-949

Good points

- Highest overall, ease of use and performance scores
- Excellent build quality
- Best battery life

Bad points

- Poor camera resolution
- No support for Adobe Flash
- No USB or SD Card slot



72%

Acer Iconia A501 (3G)
\$799

Good points

- Very good build quality
- Five megapixel rear camera
- Access to full Android Market
- Good battery life
- HDMI connection

Bad points

- Issues with some Wi-Fi routers



72%

Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 (3G), \$729

Good points

- Excellent build quality
- Access to full Android Market

Bad points

- No USB or SD Card slot



a small range of apps in a very compact and competitively priced package, further blurring the line with tablets.

Tablets can be very convenient and surprisingly effective. Light, simple and highly portable, they handle with ease common tasks such as web browsing, email, ebook reading, editing documents, playing multimedia (music, videos), games, GPS navigation, live information updates, VoIP voice calling, video calling and more.



71%

Asus Eee Pad Slider
\$649

Good points

- Five megapixel rear camera
- Keyboard
- USB and Micro-SD

Bad points

- Poor battery life



71%

Motorola Xoom (3G)
\$597

Good points

- Five megapixel rear camera

Bad points

- No USB or SD Card slot

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		PERFORMANCE						FEATURES						SPECIFICATIONS					
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Performance score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Apps score (%)	Versatility score (%)	Build quality score (%)	Phone functionality	USB 2.0	HDMI	Wi-Fi N	3G	Bluetooth	GPS	SD	Micro-SD	Battery life (hr:min)*	Weight (kg)	Size (mm. H x W x D)
Apple iPad 2 (64GB + 3G)	949	83	82	85	88	72	90				✓	✓	✓	✓			9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Apple iPad 2 (32GB + 3G)	839	83	82	85	88	67	90				✓	✓	✓	✓			9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Apple iPad 2 (16GB + 3G)	729	82	82	85	88	62	90				✓	✓	✓	✓			9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Apple iPad 2 (64GB)	799	82	81	85	88	61	90				✓		✓				9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Apple iPad 2 (32GB)	689	81	81	85	88	56	90				✓		✓				9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Apple iPad 2 (16GB)	579	81	81	85	88	51	90				✓		✓				9:50	0.6	241 x 185.7 x 8.8
Acer Iconia Tab A501 (3G)	799	72	69	71	79	75	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		9:25	0.8	180 x 260 x 11
Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 P7500 (3G)	729	72	69	71	79	67	90				✓	✓	✓	✓			8:20	0.6	175 x 256 x 9.4
Asus Eee Pad Slider	649	71	72	72	79	58	70	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	5:45	0.9	185 x 272 x 19
Motorola Xoom (3G)	597	71	72	67	80	66	80		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			8:40	0.7	168 x 247 x 10
Acer Iconia Tab A500	579	70	69	70	79	64	80	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		9:25	0.8	180 x 260 x 11
Samsung Galaxy Tab 10.1 (P7500)	579	70	69	71	79	55	90				✓		✓	✓			8:20	0.6	175 x 256 x 9.4
Asus Eee Pad Transformer TF101 (32GB)	799	69	72	68	79	48	70		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	9:45	0.7	180 x 275 x 11
Lenovo Thinkpad 1838CTO (3G + 64GB)	939	69	64	69	79	78	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		6:30	0.8	185 x 260 x 15
Motorola Xoom	369	69	72	66	80	55	80		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			8:40	0.7	168 x 247 x 10
Asus Eee Pad Transformer TF101	599	68	72	67	79	43	70		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		9:45	0.7	180 x 275 x 11
Lenovo Thinkpad 1838CTO (3G + 32GB)	839	68	64	69	79	72	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			6:30	0.8	185 x 260 x 15
Lenovo Thinkpad 1838CTO (3G + 16GB)	729	68	64	69	79	66	70	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			6:30	0.8	185 x 260 x 15
Sony Tablet S (32GB)	689	67	67	69	79	48	70				✓		✓	✓	✓		9:05	0.6	175 x 242 x 20
Sony Tablet S (16GB)	579	67	67	69	79	42	70				✓		✓	✓	✓		9:05	0.6	175 x 242 x 20
Toshiba AT100	499	65	62	68	79	57	50	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		8:05	0.8	180 x 270 x 17
Archos 80 G9	355	63	65	66	79	42	30		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	6:15	0.5	160 x 225 x 13
Archos 101 G9	436	63	63	69	79	42	30		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	5:10	0.7	170 x 278 x 13
BlackBerry Playbook (64GB)	799	61	63	56	53	64	80		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7:10	0.4	130 x 190 x 11
BlackBerry Playbook (32GB)	689	60	63	56	53	59	80		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7:10	0.4	130 x 190 x 11
BlackBerry Playbook (16GB)	579	59	63	56	53	53	80		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			7:10	0.4	130 x 190 x 11
Archos 101 Internet Tablet	436	57	59	58	60	53	30	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		8:20	0.6	155 x 274 x 12
Archos 101 Internet Tablet (16GB)	480	56	59	58	60	49	30		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		8:20	0.6	155 x 274 x 12
Archos 70 Internet Tablet	409	54	57	54	60	43	30		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			5:25	0.3	200 x 115 x 9
Viewsonic Viewpad 7	449	51	51	45	79	46	50	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓		3:45	0.4	113 x 180 x 9
Acer Iconia Tab W500 + KB docking	899	46	58	45	(A)	51	40	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓		3:45	1.6	195 x 270 x 14
Viewsonic Viewpad 10 S	599	43	35	50	46	55	30		✓	✓			✓			✓	4:35	0.8	178 x 274 x 12
Creative ZiiO 10" (16GB)	280	42	41	47	35	46	20		✓				✓		✓		4:55	0.7	175 x 263 x 15
Creative ZiiO 7" (16GB)	230	42	41	45	35	46	30		✓				✓			✓	3:45	0.4	135 x 210 x 11
Creative ZiiO 10"	250	41	41	47	35	41	20		✓				✓		✓		4:55	0.7	175 x 263 x 15
Creative ZiiO 7"	200	41	41	45	35	41	30		✓				✓			✓	3:45	0.4	135 x 210 x 11
Viewsonic Viewpad 10	699	41	45	41	31	45	30	✓		✓		✓					2:40	0.9	173 x 274 x 12

USING THE TABLE Models other than those on test may be available. Scores The overall score is made up of performance (40%), ease of use (35%), apps (10%), versatility (10%) and build quality (5%). TABLE NOT

	CPU brand/model	Memory (GB)	Storage capacity (GB)	Diagonal screen size (inches)	Native resolution (pixels, V x H)	Front camera resolution (Mpx)	Rear camera resolution (Mpx)	Warranty (years)	Contact
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	64	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	32	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	16	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	64	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	32	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
4.3.1	Apple A5	0.512	16	9.7	1024 x 768	0.3	0.7	1	store.apple.com/au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 250	1	26.9	10.0	1280 x 800	2	5	1	acer.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	27.8	10.1	1280 x 800	2	3	2	samsung.com.au
roid 3.2.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	12.4	10.1	1280 x 800	1.2	5	1	asus.com.au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	ns	32	10.0	1280 x 800	2	5	1	motorola.com.au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 250	1	26.9	10.0	1280 x 800	2	5	1	acer.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	27.8	10.1	1280 x 800	2	3	2	samsung.com.au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	32	10.0	1280 x 800	1.2	5	1	asus.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	59.7	10.1	1280 x 800	2	5	1	lenovo.com.au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	ns	32	10.0	1280 x 800	2	5	1	motorola.com.au
roid 3.0.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	16	10.0	1280 x 800	1.2	5	1	asus.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	27.7	10.1	1280 x 800	2	5	1	lenovo.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	11.7	10.1	1280 x 800	2	5	1	lenovo.com.au
roid 3.2	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	28.7	9.4	1280 x 800	0.3	na	1	sony.com.au
roid 3.2	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	12.7	9.4	1280 x 800	0.3	na	1	sony.com.au
roid 3.1	Nvidia Tegra 2	1	12.9	10.1	1280 x 800	2	5	1	mytoshiba.com.au
roid 3.2.69	OMAP4 OMAP4	0.512	6.1	8.0	768 x 1024	1.2	na	1	itechinternational.com
roid 3.2.69	OMAP4 OMAP4	0.512	6.6	10.1	800 x 1280	1.2	na	1	itechinternational.com
ckBerry 1.0.7.2670	TI OMAP processor	12.7	62.7	7.0	1024 x 600	3	5	1	au.blackberry.com
ckBerry 1.0.7.2670	TI OMAP processor	12.7	30.7	7.0	1024 x 600	3	5	1	au.blackberry.com
ckBerry 1.0.7.2670	TI OMAP processor	12.7	14.7	7.0	1024 x 600	3	5	1	au.blackberry.com
roid 2.2.1	ARM Cortex A8	ns	8	10	1024 x 600	na	na	1	itechinternational.com
roid 2.2.1	ARM Cortex A8	ns	16	10	1024 x 600	na	na	1	itechinternational.com
roid 2.2.1	ARM Cortex A8	ns	8	7.0	800 x 480	na	na	1	itechinternational.com
roid 2.2	ARM ARM11	ns	0.512	7.0	800 x 480	0.3	3	1	viewsonic.com.au
n 7 Home P	AMD C-50 Processor	2	19.1	10.0	1280 x 800	2	2	1	acer.com.au
roid 2.2	Nvidia Tegra 250	0.512	16	10.0	1024 x 600	1.3	na	1	viewsonic.com.au
mware 2.1 - 2	ZiLABS ZMS-08 HD	ns	16	10.0	1024 x 600	0.3	na	1	au.store.creative.com
mware 2.1 - 2	ZiLABS ZMS-08 HD	ns	16	7.0	800 x 480	0.3	na	1	au.store.creative.com
mware 2.1 - 2	ZiLABS ZMS-08 HD	ns	8	10.0	1024 x 600	0.3	na	1	au.store.creative.com
mware 2.1 - 2	ZiLABS ZMS-08 HD	ns	8	7.0	800 x 480	0.3	na	1	au.store.creative.com
n 7 Home P + roid 2.2	Intel Pine Trail N455	1	16	10.0	1024 x 600	ns	na	1	viewsonic.com.au

* Based on web-browsing with Wi-Fi active. (A) No app store for Windows tablets (scored as 0). ns Not stated. na Not applicable.

COURT CAPERS

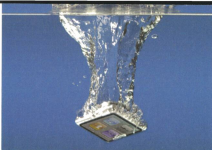
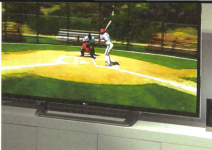
Apple's efforts to battle its competitors in the courts over what it believes to be copyright infringement – such as over Samsung's Galaxy Tab 10.1 – have suffered a couple of setbacks in recent months.

In November 2011, the Federal Court reversed an earlier decision banning the sale of the Galaxy Tab in Australia, a decision endorsed by the High Court in December last year, releasing the Galaxy Tab for sale. And in Germany, where the tablet has also been banned, comments by the presiding judge on the modified Tab 10.1N indicated that the ban is likely to be lifted there too.

The claim that the Galaxy Tab's design mimics the iPad's too closely is a relatively easy case to make. But the real area of dispute is the software, with Apple contending Google's Android operating system contravenes other patents. In a counter-suit, Samsung claims Apple's iPhone and iPad infringe its own patents.

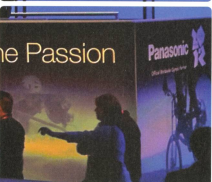
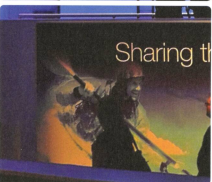
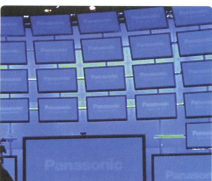
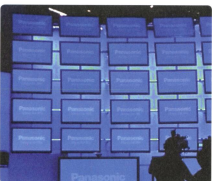
There are more than 250,000 patents relating to smartphones and tablets, so it's not surprising to see disputes between manufacturers over infringements and licence fees – there's lots of money at stake. Back in 2006, BlackBerry manufacturer Research In Motion was obliged to pay more than \$600 million in licence fees to a company called NTP to maintain its phone production. Google has been on a spending spree over the past year, buying up thousands of patents – most notably from Motorola and IBM – to shore up its patent portfolio and help protect it from further debilitating court proceedings. And it's not alone – patent lawsuits are becoming endemic as more and more technology companies are caught in the growing crossfire of legal challenges. ■

SAMSUNG



THE FUTURE IS NOW

What features can you expect to see in TVs and other appliances in 2012? **Chris Ruggles** and **Denis Gallagher** find out



Tune in, turn on

There's more to evolving televisions than bigger screens. **Chris Ruggles** checks out new TV technology and whether it's worth getting excited about

TV is becoming a central device in the home for more than just watching free-to-air broadcasts. DVD and Blu-ray are taking up more of our screen time, along with our own DVR recordings and

downloads, and there's a growing interest in online TV from catch-up websites such as ABC iView, video sites such as YouTube, or even pay-for-view sites such as MUBI. Whichever way you look at it, TVs are becoming more like computers.

Over the next year we expect to see a

number of changes to the way we use our TVs and even the sorts of TV we might be interacting with. We outline some of the new technologies you might see promoted in stores over the next 12 months or so. Our experience suggests not all of them will be helpful.

TV TALK

Ever dreamed of being able to talk to your TV? Neither have we. But we can see voice-based control working at a very basic level of commands. And it could be a great help for anyone with dexterity issues. Problems arise when commands go beyond simple "turn on/off" statements. With this technology you usually need to preface commands with something such as "TV turn off" so general conversation doesn't cause problems, but that doesn't always work. We expect there'll be a remote control included as a fall-back for those times when the TV just isn't paying attention.

TV WAVE

Last year saw the introduction of the LG TV controller that allows you to move a cursor around by pointing it at the screen – handy if you're visiting websites or navigating through some of the menus. In 2012 we expect to see TVs that recognise gestures without the need for a controller.

Being set free from the remote control sounds great, but will depend on the implementation. We can see some potential disappointment for people who get excited while watching sport, for example, and find themselves inadvertently changing channel.

TV IN YOUR FACE

As if talking and waving at the TV isn't enough, there's a real possibility that it'll recognise you as soon as you walk into the room.

Face recognition software isn't a new technology, and where there are only a few possible faces to recognise it's likely to work well. The advantage would be that a TV can be set up to provide different members of the household with menus and options that suit their needs, while hiding others that are inappropriate or are just not interesting. Of course, some people might just find this a bit creepy, and we anticipate it could lead to some interesting family disputes over who should have priority.

TV SWIPE

While live in a world of apps, and the connection between your TV and other electronic devices is likely to become closer as the year rolls on. You can already program some DVRs from a mobile phone or tablet using an app, but these devices will soon be able to take the place of the remote control or allow you to control a stream directly from a home network. ▶

OLED VS CRYSTAL LED

Organic light-emitting diodes (OLEDs) have been touted as the next big thing in TVs for a couple of years now. Sony and LG produced some small (27.5cm) and very expensive (about \$7000) OLED TVs, but these were mainly for demonstration purposes.

OLED TVs have the advantage of being very thin, light and bright with intense colours and deep blacks, minimal if any motion blur and using very little power for their size. But there's some question over the life of the panel, which may lose

its brightness relatively quickly. Samsung, along with LG, has recently unveiled 137cm OLED TVs that it claims will be on the market in late 2012. Prices aren't available, but rumours suggest they'll be every bit as expensive as the early plasma TVs, so expect to pay in the tens of thousands of dollars.

Sony has chosen a different tack, and you can expect to see marketing for its crystal LED technology before the year is out. This is a screen made up of about six million red, green and blue LEDs,

which Sony claims will provide excellent colour and viewing angles with relatively low energy use. Unlike most LCD/LED TVs there's no LCD component, so it should handle fast-moving objects better. We'll be putting this to the test once we have one in our labs.

If you're in the market for a TV now, plasma and LCD TVs are going to be around for some time and can provide very good pictures, so there's little point waiting for expensive technologies that have yet to be proven.

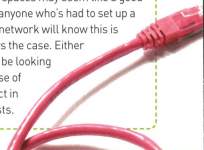
The 'ad' in bad

Not all our predictions are about cool stuff you might want on your TV. Samsung and LG are both suggesting you'll soon be seeing ads that start as soon as you turn on the TV or switch to its menu system. These will be targeted ads based on your viewing preferences, but what they describe as a win-win for broadcasters and advertisers we think could be a real turn-off for viewers.

AN UNWIRED LIFE

Connecting TVs to other devices such as DVRs, DVD or Blu-ray players can be difficult enough, but things can get very tricky when you add a home computer network. Most TVs we've tested over the past year have a network connection, and there's every reason to believe these will become even more common in the future.

Reducing the number of wires in our living spaces may seem like a good idea, but anyone who's had to set up a wireless network will know this is not always the case. Either way we'll be looking at this ease of use aspect in future tests.



Toys and tech

The Consumer Electronic Show – CES to those in the know – is the world's largest gadget preview event. **Denis Gallagher** checks out the tech on its way

PROTECT YOUR GADGET FROM YOURSELF

When it comes to cool devices, sometimes the most interesting things to come out of CES are devices and technologies that protect your existing gadgets. Two companies showed off a waterproofing process to keep your smartphone or tablet from being damaged through accidental immersion.

The waterproofing process coats your device with an undetectable membrane, saving it from harm if it's accidentally dropped in water or slips out of your pocket into the pool, sink or loo. While this process by a company called H2O (hzo.me) is applied at the production level, which means it's only available for new items, another company called Liquipet (liquipet.com) offers a service whereby you can send your existing device to be waterproofed,



with protection from water even in the headphone jack, SIM card holder and mic.

The CHOICE tester who attended the conference witnessed this technology in action, observing an iPhone operating in a water-filled tank.

WHEN APPLIANCES GO BAD

While wireless connectivity has been a common feature in digital cameras and TVs for some time, it's only just starting to appear in other "smart" appliances in the kitchen and laundry. Both LG and Samsung released a number of appliances at the CES designed to make your life easier and stress-free – or so they say.

The Samsung RF4289 is a four-door French door fridge with an eight-inch Wi-Fi-enabled touchscreen that can

manage your grocery list, track the expiration date (or you could look at the back of the milk carton) and most importantly remind you to use your food (or open the fridge and look inside). While we're yet to test it, if it's anything like the LG TV fridge we tested a few years ago, expect this latest ambitious offering to be available at a bargain-basement price soon after its release.



UPGRADING TV

Most new TVs come with a USB slot or other mechanism for upgrading software. As TVs become more connected to the internet and provide a multitude of services requiring software specific to their function, software upgrades will have to be easier. They'll also need more processing power, and Samsung is already claiming a dual-core processor capable of multi-tasking so you can watch TV and run another application in the background.

2K, 4K, 8K, more? Who cares?

As the year wears on you'll probably start hearing talk of ultra high-resolution TVs. These new standards describe the number of pixels that are stored in video production: 4K refers to 4096 pixels stored in the horizontal axis, but the vertical axis will vary depending on the device that creates and stores the video.

So 2K is 2048 horizontal pixels and 8K is 8192 – but should you care? The answer is probably not.

A few 2K- and 4K-capable TVs have been manufactured but mainly to demonstrate the technology, and there are currently no plans that we know of for broadcasting in these formats.

THE PERFECT SHOT?

Digital cameras offer more resolution and features than ever before – and yet there are times when we still can't get the perfect shot. No matter how many automatic exposure settings a camera has, it remains a challenge to quickly select the appropriate exposure setting to get the ideal photo.

Lytro (lytro.com) has offered an interesting solution by capturing all the potential exposure combinations and letting you decide how you want to make the image look after the shot. Known as a light field camera, the device captures a scene in such a way that you can alter the focus of the shot after you've taken the picture. You can even post the complete image file online and let the viewer alter the scene to suit.

The Lytro camera is a simple rectangular case with an 8X optical lens at one end and a 33mm LCD monitor at the other. It's priced at US\$499 for the 16GB version without a flash, so you need to use available light. The resulting HD quality images are ideal for displaying on a large-screen TV, but may not be good enough for printing photos much larger than postcard size. However, the technology promises to offer an intriguing new path for digital camera makers desperate to deliver something to help the average user get that perfect shot.

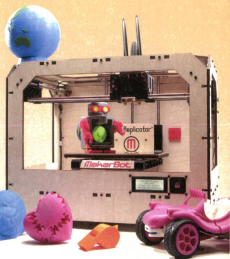


3D printing

Given the current obsession with 3D in TV, it's logical we'd start demanding everything to be delivered in the third dimension, including printing.

The Replicator by MakerBot Industries (makerbot.com) is a 3D printer you can buy online (US\$1749) to print virtually anything up to 300 cubic inches, or about the size and shape of a loaf of bread. The printer uses materials such as a plastic-like material made from corn called polylactic acid (PLA), as well as ABS plastic, which is the same material found in Lego pieces.

While the original purpose of these printers was to create 3D designs to help bring concepts to life for the engineering industry, hobbyists are creating anew their own 3D objects to display and share. For example, you can create your own train compartments or toy figures, or print a series of objects that are assembled to create a larger object. A site has been established (thingiverse.com) for like-minded 3D print fans to share their designs with others. ■





Denis Gallagher checks out your options for adding digital radio separates to your hi-fi system

Digital radio can deliver better, interference-free sound than AM or FM. However, since most of the available digital radios are table-top or portable models with tinny speakers, your first experience may not be a pleasant one.

Thankfully, more component digital radio tuners are appearing on the market, allowing you to enjoy digital radio as it was meant to be enjoyed – through a good pair of speakers.

We put nine digital radio (DAB+) tuners designed to be integrated into a hi-fi system to the test. Several units, including our two top-performing models (see page 56), offer additional features such as iPod connectivity, the ability to play music files stored on a USB drive and also access to thousands of radio stations around the world via the internet.

Digital radio has been in Australia for a few years, but unlike analog TV, which has set cut-off dates, there are no plans to switch off analog radio. Before buying a digital radio, visit

Nutshell

- ▶ Digital radio tuners allow you to enjoy the benefits of digital radio without having to buy a dedicated table-top or portable player.
- ▶ Unlike analog TV, there is no definitive date by which analog radio will be switched off.

digitalradioplus.com.au and type in your postcode to see if you're in an area that receives a digital radio signal. If you live outside the mainland capital city areas, you can forget about digital radio for the next 12 months at least. ▶

Pop-up radio

DAB+ offers the flexibility to quickly establish radio stations for a short period of time – often no more than a couple of weeks – to enhance local events. Called event stations or pop-ups, these stations may exist to support an artist's tour, for example playing Lady Gaga's back catalogue during a national tour. A recent pop-up by the ABC featured a dedicated DAB+ station for continuous coverage of the Australian Open tennis tournament. These broadcasts generally aren't available anywhere on the FM or AM band, and unlike tuning into an FM or AM band, you can easily find a DAB+ station by using context-sensitive search terms related to the event such as *Gaga* or *Australian Open*.

Can you see the +?

When buying a digital radio for Australia, make sure it has DAB+ somewhere to show it will work locally. Any product that just has DAB on the box or unit should be avoided as it's most likely made for the UK market and may not work here.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Screen size and shape are important so you can see the scrolling text, particularly when searching for a station by its name.

iPod support This can be through – either a dedicated cradle, where the iPhone/iPod sits in to be charged, or a USB connection where you simply connect the device through a cable.

The remote control should have buttons big enough to press without touching the adjacent ones, and clear labels, ideally with different shapes to quickly associate with different tasks.

A clock with an alarm is useful for waking up in the morning, and can also be used to remind you that a program you want to hear is about to start. Digital radios can update their clock time from the broadcast, so they should keep accurate time and recover better than an analog radio after a power outage.

Wireless networking (Wi-Fi) with internet access allows you to stream music data to your tuner.

This opens up a huge number of radio programs from around the world and also allows you to play music stored on your PC in other areas of your home. All models on test with wireless support can access internet radio stations

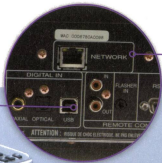
and podcasts. However, internet radio uses about 60-80MB of data per hour, so make sure you have a generous broadband plan if you want to listen to a lot of internet radio. The Marantz is the only model on test with internet radio that doesn't have wireless, meaning you have to connect via an **ethernet cable**.

Channel presets allow you to select your favourite stations and assign them to a button or special listing in the radio's menu.

Adjustable volume Some units have an adjustable volume selection on the remote, allowing you to control the sound levels of the tuner without having to reach for the amplifier remote control.

Sound quality is likely to be better than AM and possibly even FM transmissions, provided it's broadcast in high quality. However, broadcasters can choose to use a higher compression rate, which gives them the potential for more channels but reduces sound quality.

Station searching by name is easy and intuitive with most models on test, but a good display arrangement is essential.



WHAT TO BUY



\$999

82%

Marantz NA7004

Good points

- Excellent reception
- Internet radio and media streaming via ethernet
- Supports iPod with optional accessory or via a USB connection
- Only model on test to incorporate a D/A converter, allowing you to use a digital audio device with an analog amplifier
- Supports Airplay for iPad/iPhone/touch media [with wireless router]

Bad points

- Needs router for wireless connectivity
- Ease of use when working with internet radio is not as good as the other models on test



\$799

81%

NAD C446G

Good points

- Excellent reception
- Good on-board controls and remote
- Four lines displayed when scrolling a list of stations
- Very good internet radio ease of use
- Internet radio and media streaming via ethernet and wireless
- USB port also plays common audio file formats on a flash drive
- Supports iPod with optional accessory or via a USB connection

Bad points

- Presets only borderline for ease of use



\$599

81%

Yamaha T-D500

Good points

- Excellent reception
- Easiest to use among our recommended models

Bad points

- Limited screen area
- Presets only borderline for ease of use

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1300 360 655



		PERFORMANCE								FEATURES																															
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)		Reception score (%)		Remote control score (%)		Presets and favourites score (%)		Standby energy score (%)		Internet radio ease of use score (%)		AM radio		Internet radio		Audio streaming		iPod mode		Wireless (802.11 b/g)		Ethernet port		3.5mm headphone socket		USB		Coaxial digital audio (RCA)		Toslink (optical)		Stereo RCA		Clock		Alarm		
Marantz NA7004	999	82	68	98	70	77	100	68	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
NAD C446G	799	81	71	98	74	54	100	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Yamaha T-D500	599	81	76	98	68	54	100	na	✓																																
Digitech AR1753	199	77	71	98	82	56	40	na																																	
Sangean WFT-1D	499	76	73	93	72	80	40	80		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓																									
Sherwood TX5505iD	437	70	67	93	69	0	80	73	✓	✓	✓			✓																											
Cambridge Azur 650T	599	69	78	68	70	56	60	na	✓																																
Arcam FMJ T32	999	66	66	65	60	89	60	na	✓					✓																											
Nextwave DAB390	249	55	31	68	74	60	40	80		✓	✓			✓	✓																										

Best Buy



\$199

77%

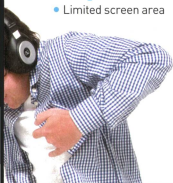
Digitech AR1753

Good points

- Very good remote control
- Excellent reception
- Lowest-priced model on test

Bad points

- Limited screen area



\$499

76%

Sangean WFT-1D

Good points

- Good on-board controls and remote
- Very good presets ease of use
- Five lines displayed when scrolling a list of stations
- Very good internet radio ease of use
- Excellent reception
- On-board volume control
- Internet radio and media streaming via ethernet and wireless

Bad points

- Awkward initial access to DAB antenna socket

ABOUT THE REST

The **Sherwood** has excellent reception as well as AM radio and support for internet radio via a wireless connection. However, the lack of user presets for DAB+ or internet radio is a major drawback.

The **Cambridge** may appeal if you have other Cambridge components as its remote can be used to control other Cambridge devices.

The **Arcam** is the only model without a digital audio output, and its overall performance and ease of use is only OK.

The worst-scoring **Nextwave** is a fraction the size of the other models but is still designed to perform as a stereo system component rather than an all-in-one radio. It has a good remote but lacks any on-board controls. It also has poor standby usage, and the performance in our difficult-reception area was not as good as the others. However, it may be a good option if you're in a good reception area and turn the device off when not in use.

SPECIFICATIONS

Display (lines x characters)	Display dimensions (mm, W x H)	Preset/favourites	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact
2 status lines + 1 x 17	84 x 21	99 DAB, FM and AM combined	10.5 x 44 x 34.5	6.55	marantz.com.au
4 x 22	80 x 20	40 DAB, FM and AM combined	10 x 43.5 x 34	4.68	nad.com.au
2 x 16	73 x 14	40 DAB, 30 FM, 30 AM	9 x 43.5 x 31	3.44	au.yamaha.com
Large time + 2 x 17	65 x 26	12 DAB, 12 FM	7 x 43 x 32	2.95	jaycar.com.au
6 x 22	56 x 30	10 DAB, 10 FM, 10 internet	7 x 43 x 27	2.75	sangean.com.au
2 x 16	60 x 15	40 AM and FM combined	8 x 43.5 x 30.5	3.18	sherwood-av.com.au
2 x 16	64 x 11	20 DAB, 20 FM, 20 AM	8.5 x 43 x 32	4.35	cambridgeaudio.com.au
2 x 22	82 x 14	100 DAB and FM combined	8.5 x 43.5 x 30	5.35	arcam.com.au
6 x -22	56 x 30	10 DAB, 10 FM, 10 internet	9 x 15 x 5.5	0.26	nextwave-digital.com

USING THE TABLE Scores

The overall score is made up of ease of use (30%), reception (30%), remote control (20%), presets and favourite settings (10%) and standby energy (10%). Internet radio ease of use is not included in the overall score.

Station presets allow you to select your favourite stations and assign them to a button or special listing in the radio's menu.

Price Recommended retail, as of February 2012. All radios on test have a back button, LCD mono screen support DAB+ and also FM radio broadcasts. **TABLE**

NOTES are not applicable.

(A) USB connected devices appear as external drives for media playback with USB connection on front and back.

(B) USB connected devices appear as external drives for media playback. (C) Also has digital coax, Toslink and stereo RCA inputs, allowing the unit to operate as a D/A converter.

(D) Has two RCA stereo connections. (E) Has two separate alarm settings.



The big freeze

Does bigger mean better when it comes to fridges? **Matthew Steen** finds out

The giant Samsung SRF801GDLS fridge we mentioned in *CHOICE* Dec 2011/Jan 2012 is undoubtedly versatile – it has more adjustable zones than you can shake a steak at. Its huge 800L capacity means that Samsung-recommended service people had to dismantle its doors and reassemble them just to get it into our thermal rooms for testing. So keep in mind it may cost you more than \$200 should you have this fridge delivered and installed.

Its large interior is good for those with a big family, and the bottom-mounted freezer makes ergonomic sense. However, it's only OK in its range score, which tracks if

there is an adequate range of temperature combinations.

The Samsung also has a FlexiZone drawer between the fridge and freezer compartments, and we expect to see more of this feature in future as manufacturers try to differentiate their products in a competitive market. You can set this to one of four preset temperatures that Samsung's advertising material claims is for meat and fish or soft defrost (-3°C), cold drinks (0°C), deli snacks (3°C) and wine chill (6°C). This differs substantially from what is on the fridge itself (-1°C, 1°C, 3°C, 7°C). We tested it at the coldest setting and found it was about -1°C, as stated on the fridge.

While FlexiZone is nifty, we found the Samsung doesn't remember the preset zones when the power is turned off, so check your settings if you have a blackout.

Nutshell

- Five newly tested fridges join our previously tested ones. None makes our recommended list.
- The mammoth Samsung fridge's FlexiZone feature is useful in theory but not always in practice.

The Samsung also takes longer than other fridges on test to stabilise after a power down, but performs OK overall.

Of the other newly tested fridges, the Electrolux ESE7007SE has very poor fluctuation performance. Each time the compressor kicks in or turns off, temperatures in both the fridge and freezer fluctuate over a few hours. This could affect food quality, depending on your fridge settings. The Bosch KAN62V00AU also has poor fluctuation. The Changhong, a new entrant to the market, has a good overall score but is let down by a poor ambient score, so won't cope well with changes in temperature. ▶



WHAT TO BUY

These are the best fridges in each size range, each scoring a minimum of 60% for all aspects of temperature performance except the recommended setting score – you can change this to get a better result. Best

For profiles of the models in the What to Buy list, see the CHOICE issue indicated or go online to choice.com.au/fridges

Buys are top performers with a good brand reliability rating that are relatively cheap to buy and run.



300-380L
Fisher & Paykel
E372B (B), Dec 11/Jan 12



300-380L
Fisher & Paykel
E381T Tasman, (T), May 06



300-380L
Westinghouse
WBM3700WB, (B), May 09



381-450L
Fisher & Paykel E442B
(B), Dec 10/Jan 11



381-450L
Fisher & Paykel E406B
Elegance, (B), May 09



451-525L
Fisher & Paykel
E521T Elegance, (T), Nov 06



451-525L
Westinghouse
WBM5100WB, (B), Sept 09



\$1999



\$3299



\$3499



\$2009

MORE THAN 525L, INCLUDING FRENCH DOOR

Haier
HTD647AS, (FD), Apr 11

Fisher & Paykel
RF610ADUX, (FD), Nov 07

LG GR-L219CSL (FD),
Dec 11/Jan 12

SIDE BY SIDE
Westinghouse
WSE6100WA, Nov 05

(B) Freezer on bottom. (T) Freezer on top. (FD) French doors.

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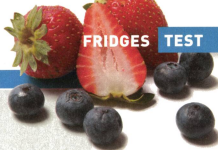
choice
SHOPPER

1300 360 655

COSTS

PERFORMANCE

		Price (\$)	10-year running costs (\$)	Overall score (%)	Freezer	Number of doors	Temperature performance score (%)	Fluctuation score (%)	Range score (%)	Uniformity score (%)	Ambient change score (%)	Recommended setting score (%)	Energy efficiency score (%)	Claimed / measured energy use
< 300L	Westinghouse WTB2500WB	739	887	70	Top	2	67	80	70	75	33	85	82	415 / 403
	Westinghouse WTB2300WB-XAU	689	887	67	Top	2	63	80	70	60	29	80	81	411 / 403
	LG GN-253VW	699	928	65	Top	2	61	45	70	70	58	80	81	435 / 422
	Whirlpool WRI21UW	699	818	61	Top	2	56	45	85	65	22	70	83	415 / 372
	Mitsubishi MR-C375B-ST-A	1250	1034	58	Bottom	3	52	40	45	50	81	65	79	500 / 470
SMALL (381-380L)	Fisher & Paykel E372B	1329	1096	81	Bottom	2	81	75	90	70	89	90	81	498 / 498
	Fisher & Paykel E381T	989	933	79	Top	2	77	60	80	85	90	80	85	433 / 424
	Westinghouse WBM3700WB	1269	1058	76	Bottom	2	74	65	90	75	67	70	82	495 / 481
	# Changhong CHR310	599	856	75	Top	2	73	90	85	70	36	65	85	435 / 389
	# LG GC-305PS	899	1008	71	Bottom	2	68	60	75	85	51	85	82	476 / 458
	Kelvinator KBM3800WB-R	1109	1155	70	Bottom	2	68	80	55	70	69	50	80	555 / 525
	Samsung SR364MW	949	955	70	Top	2	66	60	70	70	66	70	84	450 / 434
	Westinghouse WBM3700SB-R	1639	1063	68	Bottom	2	65	55	78	65	64	65	82	495 / 483
MEDIUM (381-450L)	Fisher & Paykel E442B	1919	1261	78	Bottom	2	78	60	90	85	81	85	79	563 / 573
	Fisher & Paykel E406B	1562	1230	76	Bottom	2	76	65	90	60	90	80	78	564 / 559
	Electrolux EBM4300SC	1959	869	75	Bottom	2	72	70	90	55	69	75	88	406 / 395
	Fisher & Paykel E440T	1749	1087	74	Top	2	72	50	85	80	77	85	83	488 / 494
	Samsung SR432NW	999	1054	74	Top	2	72	65	80	75	77	50	84	455 / 479
	Fisher & Paykel E402B	1269	1234	73	Bottom	2	72	60	85	65	80	80	78	528 / 561
	Electrolux ETM4407SC	2589	777	72	Top	2	68	75	90	65	33	70	90	369 / 353
	Kelvinator KTM4400WB	1219	1021	72	Top	2	69	65	90	70	45	80	84	486 / 464
	Westinghouse WBM4300WB	1529	1164	72	Bottom	2	70	75	85	55	66	50	81	530 / 529
	Mitsubishi MR-BF390B-W-A (A)	1067	1146	56	Bottom	2	50	30	60	60	85	70	80	520 / 506
LARGE (451-529L)	Fisher & Paykel E521T	1969	1091	78	Top	2	76	60	85	85	77	80	85	508 / 496
	Westinghouse WBM5100WB	1899	1157	76	Bottom	2	74	75	85	70	65	55	84	560 / 526
	Electrolux EBM5100SC	2379	882	74	Bottom	2	70	70	80	65	62	80	89	428 / 401
	Electrolux EBM5107SC	2849	928	74	Bottom	2	71	70	75	65	70	70	88	428 / 422
	Kelvinator KBM5100MB	1799	1305	74	Bottom	2	72	80	70	80	57	60	81	589 / 593
	Westinghouse WTM5200WB	1689	1175	74	Top	2	72	75	87	75	53	40	83	518 / 534
	Bosch KGN53X70AU/08	1899	1078	73	Bottom	2	70	80	75	70	53	60	83	505 / 490
	Fisher & Paykel E522BRXFDU	2509	1379	72	Bottom	2	70	55	85	70	77	50	79	636 / 627
	Fisher & Paykel E522B	1709	1412	71	Bottom	2	69	60	80	50	87	80	78	596 / 642
> 529L & FD	Haier HTD647AS	1999	1536	79	Bottom	3	79	90	75	80	65	90	80	690 / 698
	Fisher & Paykel RF610A	3299	1514	78	Bottom	3	78	70	80	80	83	85	79	695 / 688
	LG GR-L219CSL	3499	1489	74	Bottom	4	73	80	70	70	64	85	79	750 / 677
	Electrolux EQE6007SB-NAU	3699	1454	70	Bottom	4	67	40	85	90	85	70	84	616 / 661
	# Samsung SRF801GDL	4999	1558	69	Bottom	4	66	65	55	75	69	75	80	845 / 708
SIDE BY SIDE	Westinghouse WSE6100WA	2009	1551	77	Left	2	76	75	80	60	90	75	79	687 / 705
	LG GC-L197STF	2199	1155	75	Left	2	74	70	80	70	76	70	81	638 / 645
	Daewoo FRS-U20ICW	1499	1463	74	Left	2	72	60	80	75	74	90	81	650 / 665
	Kelvinator KSM6100WB	1689	1520	70	Left	2	67	70	85	65	38	80	80	687 / 701
	Haier HSB5562IS	1599	1703	69	Left	2	69	85	50	60	88	35	70	743 / 771
	Samsung SRS585HDIS	2199	1529	68	Left	2	65	55	90	40	85	25	78	738 / 695
	# Bosch KAN62V00AU	1899	1250	59	Left	2	52	35	60	65	83	60	86	608 / 568
	# Electrolux ESE7007SE	3799	1228	53	Left	2	45	0	90	50	85	70	87	525 / 558



FEATURES										SPECIFICATIONS			
(dB)	Chiller	Crisper drawer	Dairy compartment	Fresh food shelves/shelf positions	Rollers	All shelves removable	at 90°	Door hinge position	Dimensions (mm, H x W x D)	Claimed total volume (L)	Claimed volume, fresh food (L)	Claimed volume, freezer (L)	Contact
✓	1	✓		2/7	✓			Rev	1491 x 542 x 620	246	167	79	westinghouse.com.au
✓	1	✓		3/7				Rev	1389 x 542 x 620	230	161	65	westinghouse.com.au
✓	1			2/4				R	1605 x 537 x 604	253	179	74	lge.com.au
✓	1			2/3	✓	✓		Rev	1450 x 560 x 670	212	149	63	whirlpool.com.au
✓	1			2/3	✓	✓		R	1678 x 600 x 656	276	272	103	mitsubishielectric.com.au
2	✓			2/13	✓	✓		R or L	1595 x 635 x 736	373	250	123	fp.com.au
1	✓			3/18	✓	✓		Rev	1595 x 635 x 712	380	283	97	fp.com.au
1	✓			2/7	✓			R or L	1620 x 652 x 709	365	243	122	westinghouse.com.au
2	✓			3/7	✓	✓		R	1520 x 605 x 670	300	220	80	changhong.com.au
1	✓			2/4	✓			R	1726 x 595 x 651	305	183	122	lge.com.au
1	✓			2/10	✓			R	1720 x 703 x 641	380	267	114	kelvinator.com.au
✓	1			2/5				R	1687 x 670 x 660	365	245	120	samsung.com.au
1	✓			2/7	✓	✓		R	1620 x 652 x 709	370	243	122	westinghouse.com.au
2	✓			3/17	✓			R	1695 x 680 x 730	442	307	135	fp.com.au
2	✓			3/13	✓			R or L	1595 x 680 x 736	404	271	133	fp.com.au
✓	1			2/8	✓			R or L	1720 x 703 x 709	430	300	131	electrolux.com.au
1	✓			3/20	✓			R or L	1695 x 680 x 734	447	342	105	fp.com.au
1	✓			3/4	✓	✓		R	1701 x 725 x 717	434	301	133	samsung.com.au
2	✓			3/10	✓			R or L	1695 x 635 x 730	403	280	123	fp.com.au
1	✓			3/17	✓			R or L	1720 x 700 x 745	442	339	103	electrolux.com.au
1	✓			3/10	✓			R or L	1720 x 703 x 703	431	300	131	kelvinator.com.au
1	✓			3/10	✓			R or L	1720 x 703 x 709	431	300	131	westinghouse.com.au
1	✓			4/7	✓	✓		R	1720 x 600 x 656	390	285	105	mitsubishielectric.com.au
1	✓			3/20	✓			R or L	1695 x 790 x 734	517	400	117	fp.com.au
2	✓			3/20	✓			R or L	1720 x 803 x 709	504	348	156	westinghouse.com.au
2	✓			2/8	✓	✓		R or L	1720 x 803 x 745	510	349	156	electrolux.com.au
✓	2			2/8	✓			R	1702 x 790 x 612	505	349	156	electrolux.com.au
2	✓			2/10	✓	✓		R or L	1720 x 803 x 703	505	349	156	kelvinator.com.au
✓	2			3/12	✓	✓		R	1720 x 803 x 709	520	396	122	westinghouse.com.au
✓	2			3/4				Rev	1700 x 700 x 750	451	332	119	bosch-home.com.au
2	✓			3/17	✓	✓		R	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au
2	✓			3/17	✓	✓		R or L	1700 x 790 x 736	519	360	159	fp.com.au
✓	2			4/15 (D)	✓	✓		na	1770 x 910 x 710	647	423	211	haierappliances.com.au
2	✓			2/14	✓			na	1780 x 900 x 730	614	433	181	fp.com.au
✓	2			2/14	✓	✓		na	1771 x 908 x 763	610	402	196	lge.com.au
✓	2			2/4	✓	✓		na	1720 x 890 x 818	602	370	232	electrolux.com.au
(B) 2	✓			3/7 (E)	✓	✓		na	1774 x 908 x 920	801	433	225	samsung.com.au
2	✓			3/12	✓			na	1754 x 898 x 741	606	357	249	westinghouse.com.au
2	✓			3/9	✓			na	1758 x 894 x 690	567	353	214	lge.com.au
(C) 2	✓			3/6	✓			na	1790 x 895 x 730	618	377	241	daewooelectronics.com.au
1	✓			4/12	✓			na	1754 x 898 x 741	606	357	249	kelvinator.com.au
1	✓			3/9	✓	✓		na	1768 x 890 x 770	560	348	212	haierappliances.com.au
1	✓			3/9	✓			na	1789 x 912 x 721	585	364	221	samsung.com.au
2	✓			3/7	✓	✓		na	1755 x 910 x 770	678	415	263	bosch-home.com.au
✓	2			3/10	✓			na	1754 x 1000 x 740	700	450	249	electrolux.com.au

USING THE TABLE

Scores The overall score consists of temperature performance (80%) and energy efficiency (20%). **Temperature performance** This score consists of fluctuations (30%), range (25%), uniformity (20%), ambient change (20%) and recommended setting (5%). **Features** See What to Look For, page 62. **Energy efficiency** is based on the fridge's energy consumption, taking into account its size. **Noise level** These are comparative measurements taken 1m up and 1m away from the fridge during normal running. Fridges can sound noticeably louder as the compressor starts and stops and may make unusual noises during automatic defrosting. **Claimed volumes** This is how much air space the fridge has to cool; less space is available for storage. Use the volumes to get an idea of how big the freezer is compared with the fresh-food compartment.

10-year running costs are calculated at a rate of 22c/kWh. A 10-year period gives a useful indication of the long-term differences between high and low energy use – and you should expect your fridge to last at least this long. **Price** Recommended retail, as of January 2012. Many fridges are available in other styles and finishes, at a different price. Some can also be built into cabinets with a door kit that matches your kitchen cupboards. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested model. na Not applicable – doors are side by side. **Rev** Reversible door. (A) Discontinued, but may still be available in some stores. (B) FlexZone drawer can be set as a chiller. (C) This chiller was too warm in our tests for optimal storage of highly perishable foods. (D) Four half-width shelves. (E) Three variable half shelves and one small fixed shelf. ▶

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

A chiller is important for storing meat, fish and poultry (fresh or cooked) at a safe temperature for longer. If you're choosing a fridge with this feature, the chiller's temperature should be close to zero and ideally have a separate temperature control.

Crisper Look for a well-sealed crisper drawer to keep vegetables fresh; check the fridge's air outlets don't blow onto it, as this will dry food out faster. A good crisper means you don't have to put your fruit and veggies in plastic bags. A fridge with one crisper drawer is usually the full width of the fridge; two crispers are usually each half the width, but occasionally you'll find a wider and a narrower one.

A dairy compartment is convenient for keeping butter and hard cheeses slightly soft.

Fresh-food shelves should be easy to remove and replace and the range of shelf positions should suit your needs. Can you stand soft-drink or wine bottles in the door

shelves, for example? Split shelves can be handy for this.

Rollers are useful for moving the

fridge easily and cleaning behind it. It should also have adjustable feet (or rollers) for levelling the fridge. Four rollers are better than two, provided they have brakes or adjustable feet to secure the fridge in place.

Removable shelves Having all shelves removable when the door is at 90° is important for access and cleaning when the fridge has to be positioned with the door hinge next to a wall.

Door hinge Buy a fridge with a door hinge position that suits your kitchen layout. If you tend to move house a lot, opt for a door/hinge that is reversible.

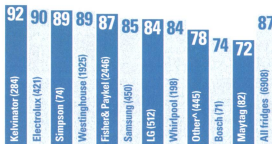
The Samsung SRF801GDL's enormous 800L model is almost the same height as a newborn giraffe



ISSUES

Our Changhong sample broke down due to a faulty temperature sensor, but was replaced quickly enough to retest

Percentage with no problems in the past 12 months



The number in brackets is the number of responses received for that brand. * "Other" includes unbranded appliances, appliances for which the brand was unknown and brands which did not meet the criteria for sample size (N=50 or more overall and N=10 or more per year group).

HOW WE TEST

Temperature performance Our tester, Corinna Horrigan, checks **temperature fluctuations** – the amount temperatures swing as the compressor stops and starts. She also checks there's an appropriate **range of temperatures** in fresh food and freezer compartments at the same time – for example, can you set the freezer at the coldest setting for longer freezer storage while keeping the fresh food section at an optimum 3°C? She checks whether the temperature is **uniform** throughout each compartment, and measures the effect on fridge and freezer temperatures when the external temperature changes (**ambient change**), such as from summer to winter. As many people only change their fridge controls once – to the **recommended setting** – Corinna assesses the temperatures on this setting. A poor score for this means you should use a thermometer to get optimum temperatures – but we recommend you do this for any fridge.

Energy efficiency is tested to the Australian standard. Corinna also checks the energy label required by law to be displayed on new fridges. ■

RELIABILITY

Fisher & Paykel and Westinghouse consistently make our What to Buy lists. Both are also among the brands our members say they're most likely to buy again.

Our survey found that up to 13% of problems with fridges relate to fittings such as handles, temperature controls or icing up of food.



Nutshell

- All induction cooktops on test perform very well or excellently.
- They work differently to other types of cooktops, so it can take a little trial and error to perfect using them.



Induction cooktops may look like a ceramic cooktop, but the way they work is very different. Each element (induction coil) in the cooktop generates a magnetic field, which in turn induces heat in the pot placed on top of it – as long as it is made of a metal that can be magnetised.

In essence, the cooktop surface doesn't get as hot as other cooktops because the saucepan becomes the element. And where the surface does heat up, it's because the base of the pan is transferring heat back. You also won't see the element glow as you would in a standard ceramic cooktop.

Because most of the heat and energy is produced in the saucepan itself, the heat response is quicker and more efficient. All models on test have pan size (and suitability) recognition, so they adjust their energy use to the size of the pan or warn you if it's unsuitable or too small. The saucepan must generally be between at least 60-75% the size of the cooking zone

(depending on the model), and not more than the recommended maximum diameter for it to work correctly.

In addition to the cost of an induction cooktop, you may have to buy a new set of cookware if your current set isn't compatible – the base of the cookware must be made of a ferrous metal. Cast

iron, steel, some enamelled steel and stainless steel pans with an iron base or core are suitable, but glass, aluminium, copper and many stainless steel pans are not. A magnet will stick to the base of most compatible cookware, but check the cookware manufacturer's recommendations to be sure. ▶

Magnetic appeal

Martha Psiroukis outlines how induction cooktops work, and what to expect when using one

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Element size The pot bases need to be within the recommended size for each cooking zone.

Controls should be logical and not positioned too close to the elements.

Auto heat-up allows the cooking zone to heat to a higher setting, then automatically turn down to a preset setting after a certain amount of time. This is handy if you're cooking rice via the absorption method, for example, when you want to bring it to the boil

initially and then simmer. See the table (page 64) for which models have this.

Keep warm function is essentially a simmer setting that can be used to keep food warm.

Booster or power settings produce very high heat for a short period, ideal for boiling water fast but too hot for cooking most foods. You may well not need a model with this feature.

WHAT TO BUY

We recommend all the cooktops on test as they're all very good or excellent performers overall, and none scores below a good rating for any test. Some are a little easier to use, and although you'll get used to any of these models, some features make them simpler or more versatile. Your choice will also depend on the space or bench top cut-out you have, and the number of cooking zones you typically use at once.

Here we've profiled models with some of the more interesting features. Important functions and scores for all models are listed in the table below right. For a more detailed comparison of the other models on test, log on to choice.com.au/inductioncooktops.

**Simple
& easy**



95%

**Electrolux EHD 90230P,
\$2580**

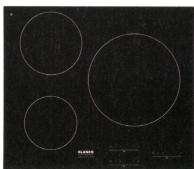
This performed perfectly on all cooking tests. Its layout is very functional, with all three large elements positioned in a line across the cooktop. Each element recognises pot diameters (12cm minimum), and you can place two smaller pots on the one element providing the cross indicator is covered. The elements are well-spaced, allowing plenty of room for larger pans. Each element has its own touch and slide control pad, adding to its simplicity. It has a booster setting on each element – the two right elements are linked so only one of these can be on booster at a time. The only downside is that the minimum and maximum pot diameters are not marked on the cooktop.

**Oversized
elements**



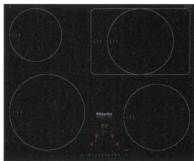
93%

Miele KM 6113, \$1999



90%

Blanco BIC63, \$1999



90%

Miele KM 6317, \$2499

For more information on induction cooktops pros and cons, dos and don'ts and electromagnetic fields, log on to choice.com.au/inductioncooktops.

The Miele and Blanco offer larger elements than most, useful if you use large boilers or casserole or rectangular/square baking dishes. The KM 6113 and BIC63 have three marked cooking zones. The KM 6113's largest zone caters for an 18-28cm pot and the Blanco 12-38cm. Both have a good layout, plenty of room between elements and generally easy-to-use controls. The KM 6317 has four cooking zones with one dual element catering for a 14-20 cm diameter pot or a 20x30cm griddle plate or baking dish – useful for making gravy without switching pans. But its element layout is a little cramped.

**SPEED
MACHINES**
Approximate time
to boil 1 litre of
water on:

8min
gas

2min
induction

6min
ceramic

PERFORMANCE		
	Price (\$)	Overall score (%)
# Electrolux EHD90230P	2580	95
# Miele KM 6113	1999	93
# Electrolux EHD 68210P	2519	92
# Fisher & Paykel C1905DTB1	2709	92
Omega OI64BB	1399	91
# Blanco BIC63	1999	90
# Miele KM 6317	2499	90
Westinghouse PHN644DU	1261	90
# Smeg SIHP264S	2290	87
# Bosch PIE675N14E	2249	86
Electrolux EHD60150P	1878	85
Bosch PIE645Q14E	1999	84

USING THE TABLE Price Recommended or average retail, as of January 2012. We changed the cooking performance and ease of use scores slightly since our last below and behind are not listed as they vary greatly depending on what the model. (A) No maximum specified.

Good
value



91% Omega OI64BB, \$1399

The Omega is the cheapest model on test. It's also the only one that draws no standby power. It has a good range of elements with good element positioning – simmer and large at the front. Its controls are easy to use, but there is only one heat setting control for all elements – you select the element first, and then use the heat setting to adjust the temperature. It also has no boost option.

What to expect

Operating noises and ventilation

space Fans within the cooktops cool the electronics and electromagnetic coils, so expect to hear them during use and for some time after it's switched off. The heat generated below the cooktop is also why the recommended installation space must be adhered to. If you're replacing a non-induction cooktop, ensure there is sufficient ventilation beneath and behind the cooktop. Also, ferrous metal objects such as utensils in a drawer below the cooktop may become hot when the cooktop is in use for an extended period of time. You may also hear whistling or cracking sounds when using sandwich-base saucepans; humming when you use high power levels; and clicking when electric switching occurs within the cooktop.

Controls and general use

Pans can slide on the glass surface so hold the saucepan when stirring to keep it within the cooking zone. Keep the touch controls free of grease and moisture or else they won't respond to touch. Some have an element selection control and a common heat setting control, meaning you select the element first then the heat setting. Others have heat setting controls for each element. Most manuals list general heat setting guides for various foods, however some trial and error is needed to understand the various settings and find out which work best with your saucepans. Power settings range from very low to very high and respond almost instantaneously when you adjust them. With a little practice you should achieve excellent results on any induction cooktop.



				FEATURES				SPECIFICATIONS						
Score (%)	Simmer score (%)	Turn-down score (%)	High heat score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Auto heat-up	Keep warm	Dual elements	Power boost	Number of cooking zones	Claimed pan diameters for each element (cm)	Element wattage (kW)	Dimensions (cm, W x D)	Installation dimensions (cm, W x D)	Contact
	100	100	100	87	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	12+ (A)	3 x 2.3	91 x 41	86 x 37	electrolux.com.au
	100	100	100	82	✓	✓	✓	✓	3	10-16/14-20/18-28	1.4/1.85/2.6	58 x 51	57 x 49	miele.com.au
	100	85	100	87	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	12+ (A)	4 x 2.3	71 x 52	68 x 49	electrolux.com.au
	100	100	100	80	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	15.5/2 x 19/22/28	1.4/1.85/2.3/2.4	90 x 53	87 x 49	fisherpaykel.com.au
	95	100	100	81					4	10-16/10-20	2 x 1.4/2 x 2.3	58 x 51	56 x 49	omegappliances.com.au
	95	85	100	85					3	10-18/12-22/12-38	2.0/2 x 2.8	58 x 51	56 x 49	blanco-australia.com
	100	100	100	76	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	10-16/14-20/14-20 (20 x 30)/16-23	1.4/2 x 2.3/2 x 1.85	58 x 51	57 x 49	miele.com.au
	95	100	90	83	✓	✓	✓	✓	4	14.5/18/21	2 x 1.4/1.8/2.3	61 x 52	56 x 49	vestinghouse.com.au
	90	85	100	80		✓		✓	4	9-16/12-23	2 x 1.4/2 x 3.0	59 x 52	56 x 49	smeg.com.au
	90	90	100	74				✓	4	14.5/18/21	1.4/2 x 1.8/2.2	53 x 60	56 x 49	boschappliances.com.au
	85	75	100	83	✓	✓		✓	4	12-14.5/14.5-18/18-21	1.4/2 x 1.8/2.2	59 x 52	55 x 48	electrolux.com.au
	85	100	90	72				✓	4	14.5/18/21	1.4/2 x 1.8/2.2	58 x 51	56 x 49	boschappliances.com.au

es The overall score is made up of cooking performance (60%) and ease of use (40%). **Cooking performance** is calculated from the simmering, turn-down and high-heat scores, weighted equally. Note that we've (2011), so scores of previously tested models have been adjusted accordingly. **Features** See What to Look For, page 63. **Dimensions/Installation dimensions** These are claimed dimensions. Ventilation dimensions top is being installed over – cabinetry shelves, drawers or an oven. Check the installation manual or the manufacturer to ensure your set-up complies with requirements before buying. **TABLE NOTES** # Newly tested

Mobilise your CHOICE

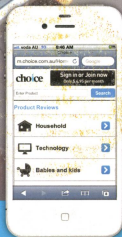
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Too hot to handle

Benchtop ovens are cheap and convenient but can become dangerously hot, as **Chris Barnes** discovers

A benchtop or toaster oven is a compact alternative to a full-sized one. They claim to be able to bake, roast, grill and toast, and some (although none we tested) even have a hotplate on top – all at a fraction of the price of a full-sized oven. So why not use one all the time? Well, while they can be useful

for small cooking jobs such as cheese on toast, and are obviously handy when space is an issue – in a caravan, for instance – they do have some drawbacks.

Pros

- Compact size.
- Convenient positioning at bench height.
- Use less energy than full-sized ovens for small cooking tasks – but see the points below about efficiency. As no models on test have clocks or digital displays, they use no standby power.

Cons

- Small size rules out big cooking jobs.
- Most aren't great at cooking, though with some experimentation you can get better results – see table, page 68.
- Despite their common description as toaster ovens, only the Russell Hobbs is actually good at toasting bread, and even then took 16 minutes to toast six slices. The others are very uneven.
- Their walls aren't well insulated, so the exterior top, rear and glass doors can

Nutshell

- ▶ Benchtop ovens can be convenient for small cooking jobs, but their lack of insulation leads to dangerously hot exteriors.
- ▶ A convection microwave oven may be a better, albeit larger and more expensive alternative.

get too hot to touch safely. (Handles and controls remained cool enough to touch safely in our testing.) The door glass reached temperatures from 81–113°C and the rear of the oven can get even hotter. Leave clearance around the oven for air circulation, be careful of touching the oven during or after use and don't leave anything on it that could be damaged by high heat.

- With bigger jobs these lose heat through the walls and take longer than full-size ovens (about two hours to cook a chicken, including pre-heating; a full-sized oven would take about one hour). Some may use almost as much energy as a full-size oven to cook a chicken. ▶

As an alternative, consider a convection microwave oven or one with a grill element, which can microwave, convection cook or grill. However, these are generally larger and more expensive, starting at about \$500

WHAT TO BUY



75%

Sunbeam Pizza Bake & Grill BT5300P

Good points

- Excellent result for roasting a chicken
- Pizza tray and roasting tray with drip tray insert are supplied
- Reversible racks provide two height options
- Interior and racks are easy to clean

Bad points

- Only OK for reheating pizza
- Door has no supported stop position



74%

Russell Hobbs RHTOV18A

Good points

- Excellent result for roasting a chicken
- Good for toasting bread (but slow)
- Roasting tray and rack/tray handle are supplied
- Door can be opened to two positions

Bad points

- Only OK for reheating pizza
- Some interior gaps and louvres may be hard to clean

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Capacity Check the oven is big enough for the dishes you want to cook, but small enough to fit your bench space.

Controls should be clearly labelled and easy to use. All models on test have three rotary controls: a timer, temperature and function selection.

Racks All have three rack positions, but some have reversible racks that give two height options.

Easy cleaning Non-stick or ceramic interiors are best; look for ones with few crevices or gaps. All on test have removable crumb trays.



CALL US TODAY
choice
SHOPPER
1300 360 655

L US TODAY		PERFORMANCE						FEATURES		SPECIFICATIONS																			
oice SHOPPER 0360 655		Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Cooking performance score (%)			Ease of use score (%)			Pizza cooking score (%)			Chicken cooking score (%)			Convection fan	Power-on light	Thermostat tight	Volume (L, claimed)	Power (W)	Measured external dimensions (cm, H x W x D)		Measured internal dimensions (cm, H x W x D)		Weight (kg)	Pizza diameter (cm, claimed)	Racks supplied	Accessories supplied	Contact
Sunbeam	109	75	77	65	63	90	✓	✓	17	1600	29 x 46 x 33	26 x 31 x 28	4.9	30	1	Pizza and roasting trays; drip tray insert	sunbeam.com.au												
Russell Hobbs	130	74	77	62	63	90	✓	✓	18	1300	30 x 43 x 29	24 x 28 x 27	5.0	26	1	Roasting tray, rack/tray handle	salton.com.au												
DeLonghi	129	63	63	63	50	75	✓		20	1300	26 x 49 x 33	21 x 32 x 26	4.7	31	1	Roasting tray	delonghi.com.au												
Breville	300	60	57	74	63	50	✓	✓	22	1500	29 x 46 x 32	25 x 31 x 31	6.0	ns	2 (B)	Pizza, biscuit and roasting trays; drip tray insert; rotisserie	breville.com.au												
Kambrook	130	60	57	72	63	50		✓	25	1400	30 x 53 x 35	26 x 34 x 29	5.4	30.5	1	Pizza and roasting trays; rack/tray handle	kambrook.com.au												
Sunbeam	164	48	44	63	38	50	✓	✓	17	1600	29 x 46 x 30	25 x 31 x 29	5.6	25	2 (B)	Biscuit (x2) and roasting trays; drip tray insert; rotisserie	sunbeam.com.au												

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of cooking performance (80%) and ease of use (20%). **Features** See What to Look For, above. **Dimensions** Rounded to the nearest centimetre. **Price** Recommended retail, as of January 2012. **TABLE NOTES** ns Not stated. (A) Discontinued, but may be available in some stores. (B) Reversible to provide two height options.



Nutshell

- All child car restraints sold in Australia must meet the requirements of the Australian standard.
- If in doubt, an approved expert fitting station will ensure your restraint has been installed correctly.

Sitting pretty

Installing a child restraint correctly is the best way to prevent injuries to your child in a crash, says **Rebecca Gatto**

Your child's safety is your top priority, and when it comes to travelling in a car there's a lot to take on board. What type of car restraint do you need? Does your car have the features to fit a restraint? What's the law on car restraints? How do you fit one and secure your child properly? These are all questions you'll have to consider.

Road accidents are the major cause of deaths in passenger children under 14 years, and research has found about 60% of children are incorrectly restrained in their seats. Common errors involve the tether strap not being connected, the seatbelt incorrectly threaded or not buckled, or the anchorage point being used the wrong way.

If you're going to install the seat yourself make sure you follow the manufacturer's instructions, but it's certainly worthwhile visiting an authorised fitting station. These centres (listed on your state's motoring organisation website) have experts that can inspect, adjust or fully install your restraint for a small fee. By using a restraint that's correctly installed, you can significantly

reduce the risk to your child in an accident.

All seats sold in Australia must meet the requirements of Australian Standard AS/NZS 1754. The Child Restraint Evaluation Program (CREP), funded by government and motoring organisations, lets you check which restraints go above and beyond these requirements. CREP conducts simulated crash tests on restraints, assesses their ease of use and applies a rating (though there aren't any results from the program for the models on test).

WHAT'S THE LAW?

Under six months Children must be seated in a rearward-facing child restraint or infant capsule.

Six months to four years old Children are to use a rear- or forward-facing car restraint with an inbuilt harness, and must not travel in the front seat of a vehicle with two or more rows.

Four to seven years Children are to use a forward-facing restraint or

booster seat. If all back seats are occupied by children under four, a child between four and seven can occupy the front seat in a forward-facing restraint or booster seat. **If a child is too big** for their age group's restraint you can move them to the next one – see our upcoming reviews of forward-facing restraints and boosters.

WHAT TO BUY



84%

Infra-Secure Cosi-Safe CS40CS

Good points

- Excellent range of seat tilt adjustments
- Removable seat insert for a child less than 9kg
- Two pockets
- Seat cover is easy to remove for cleaning

Bad points

- Seatbelt height adjustment is fiddly



83%

Infra-Secure Style Rider CS41SR

Good points

- Excellent range of seat tilt adjustments
- Removable seat insert for a child less than 9kg
- Three pockets

Bad points

- Heavy to lift
- Seatbelt height adjustment is fiddly
- Seat cover is not particularly easy to remove for cleaning



82%

Safe-n-Sound Platinum AHR Air Cushion 3515

Good points

- Very easy to adjust the seatbelt height
- Removable seat insert for a child less than 9kg
- Very good range of seat tilt adjustments
- One pocket
- Holding clip for tongue buckles while putting the child in the seat
- Shoulder height markings

Bad points

- Heavy to lift
- Seat cover is hard to remove for cleaning

ABOUT THE REST

The **Safe-n-Sound Meridian** is heavy to lift and its seat cover fiddly to remove for cleaning. Our triallist said that while the harness can't be kept apart easily, the buckle is easy to use. The **Go Safe, Mother's Choice, Safety 1st** and **ZuZu** models are easy to fit but have limited room for hands underneath the seat in the rearward-facing mode to feed the seatbelt through. These models are also let down by ease of use – adjusting the seatbelt and buckles and tilting the seat is fiddly. Our triallist said it's hard to find the buckle once the child is in the seat and the top harness can't be kept apart easily. The covers of the **Safety 1st** and **ZuZu** aren't easy to remove. ■



CALL US TODAY		PERFORMANCE		FEATURES				
choice SHOPPER		Price (\$)	Overall score (%)	Ease of use score (%)	Ease of fitting score (%)	Small child seat insert	Adjustable head rest	Shoulder height markings
1300 360 655								
Infra-Secure Cosi-Safe CS40CS		270	84	82	90	✓	✓	
Infra-Secure Style Rider CS41SR		300	83	81	90	✓	✓	
Safe-n-Sound Platinum AHR Air Cushion 3515		659	82	83	80	✓	✓	✓
Babylove Ezy Switch Charcoal BL72A/2010		259	80	80	80	✓	✓	✓
Safe-n-Sound Meridian AHR Tilt & Adjust Head Rest 3509		589	73	71	80	✓	✓	✓
Go Safe Cleo 4790		219	66	64	75	✓		
Mother's Choice Carrera #008730		299	66	64	75	✓		
Mother's Choice Emperor #009802		149	66	64	75	✓		
Safety 1st DB2010 Car Seat Nero GT #11657		329	65	63	75	✓	✓	✓
ZuZu GS2010 Car Seat Lexington #011693		168	65	62	75	✓	✓	✓

USING THE TABLE Scores The overall score is made up of ease of use (80%) and ease of fitting (20%). The ease of fitting score is made up of ease of use. **Features** See What to Look For, far right. **Seatbelt adjustment – Reposition:** the harness has to be removed completely at the harness height can be adjusted by moving the whole mechanism up or down without having to remove it completely. **Price** Recommendation



80%

**Babylove Ezy Switch
Charcoal BL72A/2010**

Good points

- Holding clip for tongue buckles while putting the child in the seat
- Seat cover is easy to remove for cleaning
- Shoulder height markings

Bad points

- No removable seat insert for a child less than 9kg
- Seatbelt length adjustment is fiddly
- Seat tilt is a little fiddly to adjust

A safe fit

The centre position of the rear seat is the best position to fit a restraint, as it offers better protection in the event of a side-impact crash. Once it's installed, you should check the restraint regularly – make sure harnesses and seatbelts are done up and adjusted firmly and that they're not twisted or caught. The tether

strap should always be firmly attached to the anchor point. When placing your child in a convertible restraint, the inbuilt harness needs to be adjusted to give a comfortable but firm fit with no slack. The harness straps should be straight and lie flat against your child.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

When buying a child car restraint, you need to consider not only its features but also the age and size of your child, as well as the features of your car.

CAR

Space Is there enough space in the back if you have more than one restraint? Is the back seat easy to get to – fitting and securing your child can be awkward in a two-door car? Is there enough leg room for the front passenger with the restraint fitted?

Anchor point This is the bolt in your car to which you attach the restraint tether strap. This strap prevents the restraint from tipping forward or moving sideways in an accident or during hard braking. Does your car have enough anchor points if you have more than one restraint? Is there enough room and a clear path for the tether strap to be adjusted properly?

Seatbelts Are they long enough to thread through the restraint in the reclining position?

Cargo barrier Station wagons should have a cargo barrier. Without one, items in the back can

cause serious injury to passengers in a crash.

RESTRAINT

Standards certified Check there is a tag on the seat showing certification to the Australian standard.

Clip for buckle tongues holds the buckles apart so you can easily put your child into the seat without all the buckles getting in the way.

Weight A heavy child seat will be difficult to carry if you need to move it from one car to another.

Shoulder height markings Restraints manufactured to the 2010 standard have approximate markings that indicate when your child is too big or small for the restraint. The Babylove, ZuZu, Safety 1st and

Safe-n-Sound have these markings but they're most clearly visible on the Babylove model. If you're after a **second-hand restraint** ensure it's in good condition. Don't buy it if it's been involved in an accident or has signs of wear. Don't use restraints more than 10 years old, as they lose their reliability over time.



IFICATIONS

	Pockets	Dimensions (cm, H x W x D)	Weight (kg)	Contact
osition	2	70 x 46 x 50	7.4	info-secure.com.au
osition	3	70 x 46 x 50	8.2	info-secure.com.au
ng	1	65 x 48 x 50	8.6	britax.com.au
osition	None	73 x 46 x 48	5.1	babylove.com.au
ng	1	65 x 48 x 50	8.1	britax.com.au
osition	None	62 x 47 x 48	4.1	igcdorel.com.au
osition	2	68 x 48 x 48	4.3	igcdorel.com.au
osition	None	62 x 47 x 48	4.3	igcdorel.com.au
osition	2	68 x 48 x 48	5.6	igcdorel.com.au
osition	None	68 x 48 x 48	4.8	igcdorel.com.au

ity of fitting in the rearward-facing mode and fitting in the forward-facing and repositioned into new slots. **Seatbelt adjustment – Sliding:** as of January 2012.



Not playing around

Choosing a safe playpen isn't as easy as it should be, says **Chris Barnes**

Nutshell

- There's no Australian standard for playpens – we think there should be one.
- Our test found only one to recommend, but five others are worth considering.

Playpens seem to be going out of fashion. Rather than pen up a child, parents tend to child-proof a room or two, close off the rest and let their kids roam (see *CHOICE*, November 2011, for tips on making a safe home for your child). While we don't recommend keeping a child in a playpen for long periods, they can still be useful for keeping a mobile baby safe while you take a shower or cook dinner. Some can also be

configured to fence off a section of a room or risky areas such as a fireplace. However, most playpens outlive their usefulness by the time your child is about two years old and able (and often determined!) to climb out.

Portable cots can often be used as a playpen at a pinch, but they aren't very roomy and we haven't included any in this test. The Chicco in this test (see right) is similar in style to a portable cot, though it isn't intended to be used as one.

There's no Australian standard for playpens, so our test is based on various Australian standards for children's products such as cots and portable cots, as well as the European Standard for playpens, EN 12227. Some manufacturers test their playpens against the European or American standard, ASTM F1004, and certification to either of these is certainly worth looking for. But we'd prefer to see an Australian standard for playpens, which would provide a common set of requirements and would benefit consumers and manufacturers alike. ■

ABOUT THE TEST

The **Infra-Secure 888 Playtime Play Yard**, **Kiddy Cots 3 in 1 Deluxe**, **Baby Dan**, **Lindam** and **Jolly Kidz** playpens are all worth considering. They have some minor safety failures, such as finger entrapment hazards or being too easy to lift off the ground. Some meet only the Australian or European requirements for gap dimensions (these are slightly different) but not both. Since they meet at least one set of requirements in this respect, we don't consider them unsafe.

The remaining playpens have some minor failures but also more serious problems such as snag points that could catch a child's clothing, with a resulting risk of strangulation, limb entrapment hazards, climbing footholds, and gates that don't latch securely. We don't recommend any of these.

WHAT TO BUY

Chicco Open Sea Square Playpen, \$249

Good points

- Foldable
- Carry bag
- Easy to unfold and move

Bad points

- Extra care must be taken to avoid finger pinch points when unfolding and folding
- The sides are high so you have to lift a child higher when placing and removing them (but it can be unzipped for easier access)
- When unfolding, bending deep into the enclosure is required to apply and release the lock

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Check the playpen is:

- More than 500mm high so a child can't escape or fall.
- Strong, sturdy and resistant to tipping and lifting from your baby leaning on the sides.

Check it doesn't have:

- Small objects that can be swallowed.
- Sharp corners, edges or points.
- Gaps and openings that can cause entrapment of a child's finger, limbs or head. Spaces between the side bars should be between 50mm

and 95mm. The European standard specifies different gaps, so a model that passes this standard may have gaps in the ranges of 12-25mm or 45-65mm.

- Projections that can injure a child when it bumps into them.
- Projections and openings that can cause entanglement with clothing – this is a strangulation risk.
- Moving or rotating components that can trap fingers or limbs.
- Projections, openings or ledges that could enable children to climb out or fall from a height.

Features

- Some of the playpens can be set up in various configurations, which is useful for sectioning off no-go zones.
- A gate means you don't have to lift a child over the sides. It should require two separate actions to open, such as unlocking and lifting, and close easily and absolutely.



For the full test results, as well as details of how we test, go to choice.com.au/playpens

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	PRICE (\$)	PERFORMANCE	FEATURES	SPECIFICATIONS	Weight (kg) *	Dimensions H x W x D (cm) **	Contact
RECOMMENDED							
# Chicco Open Sea Square Playpen	249	✓	70	✓	4-sided, metal/fabric	11.9 76 x 96 x 96	chicco.com.au
WORTH CONSIDERING							
# Infa-Secure 888 Playtime Play Yard	159	(A)	65		4-sided, plastic	10.1 66 x 116 x 116	infa-secure.com.au
# Kiddy Cots 3 in 1 Delux	170	(A)	65		6-sided, wooden	8.6 62 x 186 x 211	kiddycots.com.au
Baby Dan BabyDen	250	(A)	60	✓	6-sided, metal	14.1 76 x 107 x 126	cnpbrands.com.au
# Jolly Kidz MagicPanel Playpen	130	(A)	60		4-sided, plastic	7.7 61 x 111 x 111	jollykidz.net
# Lindam Safe & Secure Play Pen	198	(A)	60	✓	6-sided, metal	13.9 76 x 110 x 124	lindam.com
NOT RECOMMENDED							
Infa-Secure Outdoor/Indoor 884	115		65		7-sided, plastic	6.8 62 x 136 x 139	infa-secure.com.au
Kiddy Cots Pushbutton PBP3	130		65		4-sided, wooden	6.2 62 x 120 x 123	kiddycots.com.au
# Roger Armstrong Large Expandable Entertainer Playzone	150		65	✓	4-sided, plastic	7.4 61 x 116 x 116	rogerarmstrong.com.au
Valco VeeBee V1253 4-Sided Play Yard	199		65	✓	4-sided, metal/fabric	5.8 64 x 103 x 103	valco.com.au
# Valco VeeBee 6-Sided Play Yard	299		65	✓	6-sided, metal/fabric	8.8 65 x 172 x 199	valco.com.au

USING THE TABLE Price RRP, as of December 2011. **Recommended** Passed all our tests. **Worth considering** Has some minor safety failures. **Not recommended** Has at least one major safety failure. **TABLE NOTES** * Excluding supplied accessories, rounded to the nearest 0.1 kg. ** Maximum dimensions when in use, rounded up to the next cm. # Newly tested (A) Minor failures – see opposite.



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(\$2.50 per 100g)

There are many "matters needing attention" on the back of this protractor and set square set, some lost in translation. But most astonishing is the lapse into Latin.

◆ 注意事項 ◆
Matters needing attention

- 本產品易燃。請遠離高溫，以免引起危險及影響該量器的準確度。

● 因量器帶有尖銳部份，使用時應謹慎，以免割傷。

The product have some keenness part,so need to prevent bruise.

- 本量器只適宜一般測量及學習用途，不應用于其他精確測量用途。

The product only benefit measure and study, unable to do other

- 3歲以下兒童如需使用,要在家長陪同下方可進行。

Needed the paternal family accompany if the children haven't 3 years

Needed the paterfamilias accompany,
if the children haven't 3 years

Hard Word

Sharing food and sharing a good laugh is a great Aussie past time.



Shared history

Indira Wrigley regrets that Aussies no longer share food or a good laugh.



Kwit cat

Just how is sharing your household toilet with an animal "more hygienic than litter"?

Simply nuts

Given their marketing campaign, these peanut purveyors may want to rethink their product name.

Thanks this month go to Russell Allison, Judy Turnbull, Indira Wrigley, David Hall and Mrs A Voit. If you have any examples you'd like to share with other CHOICE members, send them with your full name to The Hard Word, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville, NSW 2204. Please don't email us your entries – we need the unmarked originals.



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